

EGYPT AS WE KNEW IT

E. L. BUTCHER





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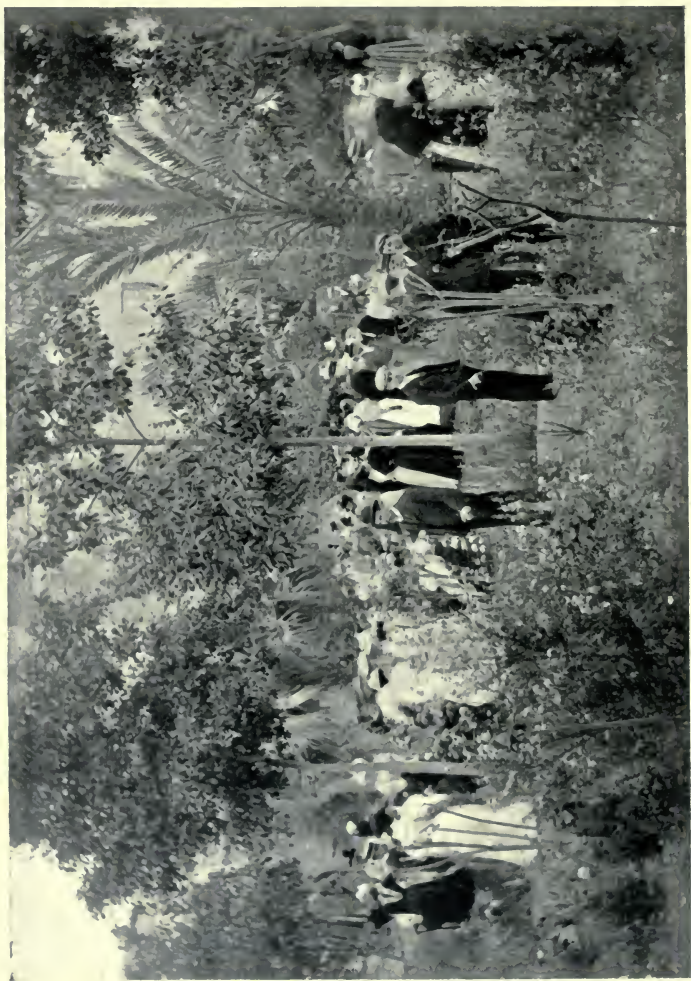


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EGYPT AS WE KNEW IT

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AN EGYPTIAN GARDEN.

EGYPT AS WE KNEW IT

BY

E. L. BUTCHER

AUTHOR OF

"THE STORY OF THE CHURCH OF EGYPT" "THINGS SEEN IN EGYPT"

"THE SOUND OF A VOICE THAT IS STILL"

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TO THE DEAR MEMORY
OF HIM WHO MADE CHURCH HOUSE AND GARDEN
A PLACE OF REST AND REFRESHMENT FOR
ALL HIS FELLOW-COUNTRYMEN

Published 1911

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BEFORE THE OCCUPATION

CHAPTER I

BEFORE THE OCCUPATION

THERE seems some excuse for writing down some personal experiences of the last thirty years when they have been spent in Egypt during the time of its great transformation. Those of us who knew Egypt in the days of Ismail, may well talk of old times, though not exactly from an Egyptian point of view. In Egypt a century is of no account, and nothing that took place after the great event of the Christian world, the birth of our Lord, is allowed as ancient. I remember more than twenty-five years ago approaching the town and temple of Denderah for the first time in company with two friends. One of them was reading up the subject and remarked in an injured tone, "Why this temple isn't old at all, *it only dates from the time of our Lord.*" But that is one of the unexpected ways of Egypt, after sleeping for four or five centuries

she will suddenly wake up and proceed to make history at such a rate that a quarter of a century will give her chronicler material for a volume. There is more difference, I venture to say, between the Egypt of Abbas and of Ismail, than between the days of Ismail Pasha in 1865 and the days of David Pasha in 1545.

Both of us came first to Cairo in the days of Ismail, though the Dean only passed through it then on his way to China. I landed in Egypt in February 1878, in response to a telegram from my eldest brother, who had offered to make a home for me in a climate which might—and did—do me a great deal of good. He had just been appointed Director-General of the Egyptian Telegraphs, though only twenty-five years of age; but he had already spent nearly eight years in the Persian Gulf, and had done a good deal of exploring on his own account in the interior of Asia. I was as ignorant as most English people of Egypt in those days. I had read the books by Sir Samuel Baker, a good deal about Gordon, who was then trying to save the Soudan, and one or two other books; but of Cairo I knew so little that I pictured it to myself a purely native city, with perhaps some twenty European residents. I was quite pre-

pared to do most of the housework myself, though I did not at all like the idea. To my amazement, we stepped out of a ramshackle railway station into a spacious well-lighted town which reminded me of Paris; we were driven away in a carriage and pair to a large stone house, and ushered into a room with a bright English fire blazing on the hearth, and a butler in orthodox costume putting the finishing touches to a charming little dinner-table, covered with La France roses! It took me some time to realise how superficial was the French polish, and how thin a plank separated this gay foreign civilisation from the dumb misery of a half-starved people.

The stone house in which we lived stood outside Cairo in a pleasant garden of its own. All around stretched great wastes of desert ground, almost opposite was the New Hotel, and the nearest houses were half a dozen villas on the way to the Nile. That house still exists. Its upper story is now the Pension Tewfik, and it stands in a solid street of shops and offices. A diagonal pathway, worn by native feet, led across the desert in front of our house to the bridge over the canal and the road for Boulak, a separate native town then, along the banks of

the Nile. In the midst of this waste sat a native fakir, who lifted his voice all day in an appeal to Allah for the charity of the passers-by. At one corner of the waste stood the recently erected English church, not even railed in, so that the pariah dogs slept on its very threshold. An English clergyman came out for the three winter months. What his "parish" consisted of then I do not know, but the number of English residents was very small. The church was built for, and almost entirely occupied by, tourists.

To be an Englishman at the head of a Government department in those days, was to occupy a position something like that of a great English lord of the manor in medieval times. Our power over the natives stopped short of life and death. We could put people into prison, keep them there for years, or take them out again, at our will and pleasure, without inquiry or formality of any kind. When I first went to the Pyramids, with but one companion, I found two sheep being roasted whole over a fire in the desert to furnish our luncheon. When we travelled it was in a special train, and, according to our rank, provision for so many "wives" must be made to accompany us. My brother, I found, was entitled to eight "harem" on his train, all

of whom I represented in my own person. Once when we woke up in the morning at a desert station we found *four* specials waiting for our orders. It happened in this wise.

We started on a journey of inspection at six o'clock one morning, and drove to Boulak da Krur. For at that time Boulak da Krur was the nearest station where you could touch the line to Assiout—it went no farther south—or in the other direction to Tel el-Baroud, where it joined the main line to Alexandria. It was to Tel el-Baroud that we were bound, and our journey was for the most part through desert, but you could generally see the distant fringe of green which marked the course of the Nile. The fresh water canal, by the side of which the line passes for a considerable distance, did not at that time produce even the thinnest line of vegetable life along the water's edge. Now, thanks to my brother, the line runs through miles of plantations, producing telegraph poles and a particularly valuable fibre. Then, owing to the loose and crumbling sand, it needed to be constantly cleaned out; and some way from Cairo we passed a band of several thousand fellahs engaged in that work. It was curious to see them swarming like ants in the distance,

for they spread thickly over a mile or two of the way. They were a wild-looking and open-mouthed multitude, in rags more or less picturesque, as they paused in their slow going to and fro with baskets of sand to watch us go by. They had no tools, only these baskets, which they filled down by the water's edge and carried up to empty on the top of the bank. A dreary dawdling kind of work it seemed, much as if they had tried to ladle out the water with teaspoons. They were presided over by patriarchal-looking old men with long flowing robes, white turbans, and thick sticks. This was the "corvée," a system which we have long since abolished. At one station we all got out and strolled round in the sunshine to inspect the one tree in the place, by an old water-wheel still in use, though a steam pump had been provided close by and apparently never worked. Here the land was no longer desert, but stretched away on either hand in a flat, green plain, covered with heavy crops of beans, wheat, and barley. The native villages were not half so unpicturesque as I imagined they would be. It is true they are merely built of dried mud with flat roofs; but they have a way of piling the houses one above another on the rising ground, so that the

straight lines and small round pigeon-towers are decidedly effective when relieved by a background of blue sky, and surmounted by the straight stems and feathery crowns of the palms.

By and by we reached Baroud, the limit of our day's inspection. I sat in the station and took a sketch of what could be seen through the arches while E. was busy, and then we went out and wandered about the country. As soon as we could, we started on our return journey. E. wanted to get back in time for a Board Meeting the same afternoon, so we went along rather fast, though when we got into the desert again a strong wind was blowing the sand across the line and piling it up in great drifts against the few obstacles it encountered.

It was the sand which drove us off the line. We had been shaking badly for some time, it was very hot, and we were all silent and sleepy when the shaking increased violently, there was a plunge forward, a crash, and E., Mohammed, Ghulamshah and I found ourselves all mixed up in a heap. We were all extracted from the carriage, but I soon came back again to sit inside it, though at a curious angle, as nothing could be done but send off messengers to the nearest

station—seven miles—to telegraph and wait for help. After sketching I tried to write a letter, and when driven by wind and sand and noise to desist, I solaced myself by reading Latimer's *Sermon of the Ploughers*, and studying the features of the scene.

It was two o'clock when we broke down, and we waited till it grew dark without any change in the position of affairs. It grew also very cold, and as I had expected to be home in the heat of the day, I had nothing except a thin cloak to put over my muslin dress, and had to take one of E.'s rugs. It was impossible to keep the wind out of the carriage, as the jar had shaken the windows, so that they did not fit properly. We had candles fortunately, and outside the Arabs lighted a fire on the sand and cowered round it.

No one came, and we began to think we were abandoned in the desert for good, but we afterwards heard that they had been busy enough about us at both ends of the line. On hearing the news by telegram, two specials were dispatched, one after another, from Alexandria; while at Boulak, when they at length heard of our accident, one of the clerks got an engine and started off to our rescue. But

as we had effectually blocked the desert line he had to go up the main line to Baroud and come down again. Meanwhile we poor creatures were roused into life about half-past eight by the welcome sound of a train whistle, and beheld the lights of the first Alexandrian engine, which had taken all this time to get down to us. It had only a second-class carriage attached of an antediluvian character—much worse than an English third, and with no glass in any of the windows. Altogether, as we could not get home without going up to Baroud and down the main line, which would have taken us half the night, E. decided that we had better pass the night at the station next on the way to Tel el-Baroud. So we stopped there and got out in a scene of wild confusion. Every one stood round with lanterns and all vociferated together in Arabic. E. explained to me that they wanted me to go into the stationmaster's harem instead of passing the night in the waiting-room. I agreed, glad of the new experience, for this was a little out-of-the-way desert station without even a village near it.

The stationmaster, a fussy little man with a shawl tied round his neck, immediately led me up a rough stone staircase and battered furiously

at a wooden door, shouting something in Arabic. A woman opened the door with many exclamations, and we came into what I suppose was a kind of hall, as it was destitute of all furniture. The harem consisted of four rooms all opening into one another. In the second there was a broad divan running half round the room and a bedstead. Almost the only other thing in the room was a brazier full of charcoal, which stood on the floor in one corner. By the side of the bed a little carpet was spread out, and upon it a woman was saying her prayers in Oriental fashion. She did not look round or appear in any way conscious of the entrance of an English stranger, though I suppose such an event could never have happened before in her life. I waited till her prayers were finished, when she came forward and greeted me. We could not of course speak to each other, as neither she nor any of the rest could speak any European language, and I knew exactly five words of Arabic, none of which suited the present emergency. By and by the stationmaster came back again and took me into room No. 3, where I was again seated on a divan, and through the open door of No. 4 could see another woman bustling about with bedclothes, and evidently

preparing her own bed for me. Meanwhile the stationmaster was bundling up and down stairs with quilts, etc., for E.'s comfort. I observed that he never came into the inner rooms without leaving his shoes on the threshold of No. 3.

After a little time they had completed all possible preparations in my honour, and the master, nerving himself for a final effort, came up to me, scrabbled at his own mouth with his hand and ejaculated the beautiful French sentence, "Mungeo? Mungeo?" I politely declined and spoke to him in French, but it was a failure. Evidently he had exhausted all the resources of his learning in that direction, so he only led me to the door of No. 4, and signed to me to enter.

This room was smaller, and contained two beds, one had been made up on the floor and the other spread with a clean quilt for me. Both had mosquito curtains of native muslin. Under the bed I perceived the family store of bread piled upon the floor; there were also some boxes in one corner filled with wearing apparel, and a lamp in the window-sill. Here I found a very pretty little woman very anxious to be friendly and talkative; but neither of us

managed to make out much of what the other wished to say. As soon as the women disappeared, I seized the opportunity to get out of the bed into which they had insisted on my climbing just as I was, and took off my boots and out-of-door things. At this juncture they both reappeared, and seeing my stockinged feet upon the carpet the little woman immediately dived down to the bottom of one of her boxes, and produced a pair of new slippers carefully packed in paper, which she gave me to put on. Then they led me to the toilette table in the next room and pointed out to me with great pride a veritable watchpocket nailed upon the wall. As, however, I happened to have left my watch at home, I could not gratify them by making use of it, and soon retreated to my bed again. In a few minutes I found them on their knees again outside my curtains, through which they poked up to me tiny cups of a liquid which I think was meant for tea, made in a coffee-pot. After this they retired, but I heard them chattering and laughing together in the outer room for a long time before my pretty friend came in and got into the other bed. I pretended then to be asleep—not that I did sleep much that night.

When it grew light I began to wonder what was the next step. I had no means of communicating with E., and he had not told me any probable time for starting. Every one else was snoring peacefully, and I did not like to disturb them, so I lay still. Suddenly, however, I heard the stationmaster in the outer room shouting to me, "Locomotive! Coming!" two words of English with which he must have carefully primed himself for the occasion. I jumped out of bed and made a hasty toilet. Downstairs I found E., looking rather exhausted after his night on the divan of an Egyptian railway station room, several natives, and Mr. A., who by working all night had managed to get our own special train up, and ready for use. That was how four specials came to be waiting for us at once in the days of Ismail Pasha.

I took for granted at the time that I had been in the private house of a Mohammedan, but I know now that nothing could have been more unlikely. In those days it was impossible to find a sufficient number of educated Mohammedans for such positions; even now, after a generation of education and with every desire on the part of English officials to favour

Mohammedans, it is not common to find a Moslem stationmaster. The despised Christian Egyptians of the old race are still appointed, though grudgingly, to posts where both intelligence and trustworthiness are required.

**THE END OF THE OLD-
RÉGIME**



A PEASANT OF ISMAIL'S TIME.

CHAPTER II

THE END OF THE OLD RÉGIME

Not long after our arrival in Egypt we were bidden to a State Ball. Some one, whether as a practical joke or not, told us that we must be punctual to the minute, so precisely at the hour indicated we were ushered into an enormous room which at first sight seemed empty. In a moment it was revealed to our horrified perception that every wall was lined two or three deep with solemn, staring men ; all natives (as I thought), all standing in respectful expectant silence, all blazing with orders and brilliant colours. There was not another woman in the place. It was too much for E., who by nature was a reserved scholar, averse to all public functions and gaieties. He hastily deposited me on the nearest divan and fled. There I sat, a shy young woman in stiff white silk, determined not to break down ; and slowly fanning myself as if I were accustomed to sit

on a throne surrounded by a ring of some hundred men. After a few dreadful moments one of the natives, in a much ornamented semi-European costume, detached himself from the glittering ring and came up to talk to me. I supposed he must be one of the stewards of the palace, and as his manner was perfectly respectful, and he evidently intended the right thing, I entered into an affable French conversation. By and by he asked leave to present his father to me. I had not an idea who his father might be, but I thought "in for a penny, in for a pound," and graciously signified my willingness to receive his father. He went away and returned in a moment with a little waddling elderly man, still more gorgeously ornamented. Fortunately, as he was an elderly man, I rose and advanced a step or two to meet him, and stood talking to both father and son till a crowd of arrivals permitted me to shrink thankfully into obscurity. I say fortunately, for in the course of the evening I discovered that I had been introduced by Tewfik, then Crown Prince, to his father the Khedive Ismail.

Those entertainments of Ismail were on a colossal scale. I remember another, at Ghezireh

Palace, where we sat down to dinner a thousand guests. We were arranged at tables holding eight to ten, and outside the gardens were all illuminated for a stroll between the dinner and a ball which followed.

Ismail lived in about half a dozen palaces at once, and up to the last was building more. Thirty-three carriages full of ladies accompanied him into exile, and even then we were told that about nine hundred were left to be provided for by his unfortunate successor. In the palace grounds of both Ghezireh and Ghizeh (which was never quite finished) there were telegraph offices, with a staff of clerks. On one occasion when my brother went to inspect the office, he found the clerks and all the other officials playing at ball in the road. On inquiry they explained that some of the ladies had expressed a desire to walk in the garden, so every man about the place had been turned into the public road.

But under all this pomp and luxury "the living foundation groaned and sighed." The peasant's crops were too often left to rot in the ground, because he could not afford the heavy bribe without which the Government official refused to come and make the assessment necessary before the cultivator was allowed

to reap them ; or they dried up and withered unripe because the nearest Pasha had taken all the available water. His misery is described in all the historical accounts ; I will mention only one significant fact, the change in the popular songs since that time.

The songs of the people are generally found to reflect popular feeling better than any other form of expression, and Egypt is no exception to the rule, though perhaps the monotonous recitative of the labourers at work should rather be called a chant than a song. Here are three specimens from different periods. The first is a translation made by one who listened to the chant of the labourers at work on the Suez railway when it was first built. In the time of Ismail it is perhaps unnecessary to remind my readers that the labour was both forced and unpaid.

CHANT OF THE MEN

Strophe.—We are all in rags, we are all in rags,

Antistrophe.—That the shiekh may be dressed in cloth.

CHANT OF THE CHILDREN

Boys.—They starve us, they starve us ;

Girls.—They beat us, they beat us ;

Boys.—But there's some one above,

There's some one above,

Girls.—Who will punish them well,

Who will punish them well.

THE END OF THE OLD RÉGIME 23

Years pass, Ismail is gone, forced labour is not altogether abolished, but the labourers are properly treated and paid. Here is the chant of the men at work on a Government undertaking under an English official.

Strophe.—The Pasha has a thick stick.

Antistrophe.—But his pockets are full of gold.

Years pass again, and an Englishman pauses to listen to the chant of the labourers at work on the building of Lord Cromer's house. It is very short and simple :

Strophe.—The howaga is good ;

Antistrophe.—The howaga is good.

The "howaga" is now a title given to any European foreigner. It originally signified, I believe, a merchant.

It was in June 1879 that the climax came. We were told that Ismail had been ordered by the Great Powers to abdicate in favour of Tewfik ; and had been given a week to decide whether he would obey or take the consequences. That was one of the hottest weeks I ever remember in Egypt. It was almost impossible to go out during the day, but after dark my brother and I used to drive round by Abdin to obtain the latest information. It was a

serious time for all of us, for no one quite knew what would happen if Ismail took it into his head to defy the Powers. It was clear that at one time he meditated revolt. Arabi, then known as a troublesome officer who with several others had been dismissed for insubordination and corruption, was recalled to favour, and took a solemn oath to stand by Ismail to the death. He was one of the first to lay his homage at the feet of Tewfik forty-eight hours afterwards. But Ismail, though he held out till the last day and kept us all in most uncomfortable suspense, was shrewd enough to know that his time had come.

On the morning of the 26th, I went with some friends in a carriage to see what might be seen between the inner and outer gates of the citadel. Within, as we knew, Ismail was going through the dramatic farce of a voluntary abdication in favour of the son whom he slighted and disliked. The steep road was sparsely lined with native soldiers, who looked as if nothing could be farther from their thoughts than a "popular demonstration" in favour of the man whom they had all been dragged in chains to serve. But nobody quite knew what would happen yet. Tewfik, as we afterwards learned,

had gone up to meet his father with very little expectation that he would be allowed to leave the place alive. At length, however, we heard the noise of his coming, and he drove rapidly past us down the steep incline, while the soldiers on either side stolidly shouted the official acclamations. No one had any suspicion of it at the time, but the new ruler was a man with a conscience, and so the downfall of the old régime had really come. Within two years the military adventurers whom he had tried to control, broke out into open rebellion against the man whom they could not understand.

CONCERNING ROBBERS

CHAPTER III

CONCERNING ROBBERS

DURING the first year or two of our stay in Egypt it was often necessary for E. to be away from Cairo for days and weeks, once or twice even months at a time. He took me with him when he could, and my memories of those journeys are both pleasant and vivid ; but sometimes it was not possible, and then I remained alone with two native servants, and sometimes hardly spoke to any one else for days. My intercourse with them was mostly by signs, though I soon began to pick up the Arabic patois used as a means of communication between the Berberin servants and their European masters. E. did engage a French woman as a cook for my sake to begin with ; but she was so very unsatisfactory that I thankfully agreed it would be better to dispense with women servants altogether. As, however, it was hardly considered safe for me to be quite alone at night—both the

native servants went home after dinner—E. provided me with a formidable revolver, and made me promise always to sleep with it by my bedside. But in my secret heart I was much more afraid of that revolver than of possible burglars, so, though I kept it always ready on a little table by my bedside, I never loaded it. I did what seemed to me a much more reasonable thing; I kept it in its case. It was a strong case of stiff, new leather firmly attached to an equally strong leather waistbelt. I argued within myself that if a robber, or a fanatical murderer, *did* try to enter my room at night he certainly would not wait for me to try and aim at him with a revolver. But I felt confident that if I instantly seized that belt and with a whirl brought the revolver down with a crack on the head of the intruder, I should be much more likely to make an impression upon him than by any attempt to put the weapon to its conventional use. The years were working up to the inevitable outbreak in 1882, and there was really some ground for anxiety. As a matter of fact I was twice waked up by the sound of some one stealthily feeling their way along the passage to my door, and each time on sternly demanding in Arabic who was there, was

answered in Arabic out of the dark by a strange voice. But in each case there was some excuse made for the intrusion which seemed plausible, and after that the native servants locked the front door and took away the key at night, so that I was locked into the house alone. This also had its disadvantages.

We occupied a set of rooms in the house of another Englishman, who with his wife and daughter afterwards became my best friends in Cairo. This was Alonzo Money of Indian fame, who was, when I knew him, English member of the Caisse de la Dette in Egypt. Now Mr. M., who had been in several battles, had a brother who was called Colonel M. because he had once been in the Militia. Colonel M.'s door opened from the same staircase as the door into our set of rooms; and there was a door of communication between our sitting-rooms, which was locked, and had a bookcase against it on our side.

One night after I had retired to bed, I heard some one knocking at the outer door, and supposing that it meant some urgent message from E., I hurried to answer the appeal. But before opening the door I naturally called out to know who was there. To my astonishment

the suave tones of my elderly neighbour, whom I hardly knew, explained that he had taken the liberty of knocking at my door because he wanted—in fact, he had some medicine to take, and he did not think it would be nice! He would be so much obliged if I would give him a lump of sugar to take after it. I replied with the utmost gravity that I should have much pleasure in doing so. But when I returned with the sugar basin I discovered that not only was the door locked, but the key was taken away, and I was a prisoner in my own house. I explained the situation with suitable regrets and regarded the incident as closed. But the suave voice on the other side only remarked helplessly, “Dear me, what are we to do now?”

“Well,” I suggested, “if it is essential, suppose you were to go down and wake up your own people.”

“Oh no!”—and there was a distinct note of alarm in the voice on the other side of the door, “I should not like to disturb them.”

“Well,” I said, carefully keeping all expression out of my voice, “I am sorry I can’t pass you sugar through the keyhole, so I don’t see what I can do. The other door is locked too.”

“Oh, but there is a key on my side to that,”

responded the Colonel eagerly. "That is a capital idea. I can manage to open that a little, and you can pass the sugar through."

So in the dead of night, and with some exertion, we managed to open the connection door about an inch, and I solemnly poked lumps of sugar through the chink at the gallant Colonel.

After all, the thief came in the day, as we might have expected in Egypt. E. was away, but I had already sent off a letter which I knew would bring him back; because a young man whom I had never seen before suddenly walked into our sitting-room, where I was sitting on the floor among flying leaves of manuscript, and said that his father had told him to come and stay with us. When he explained who his father was, I bade him welcome, and calculated how many days it would be before E. could arrive.

It may have been the next day after that when I came back from my daily walk before breakfast to find my gold watch and almost every ornament I possessed stolen from my bedroom. This was the first but not the last robbery from which I have suffered in Cairo. Jabr, our cook, was peacefully peeling potatoes in the kitchen when I burst in upon him, and

endeavoured to make him understand what had happened. He fled with consternation to the office to fetch an interpreter, and the house soon filled with native policemen. After a long and excited discussion on their part they retired, and I realised to my dismay that they were taking both servants with them to prison. Through Mr. A., who had come up from the office, I explained that I had not intended to give the servants in charge, and had no reason to suppose them guilty. They appeared to regard my statement as entirely irrelevant, and supposing that perhaps the procedure of the country necessitated the prompt appearance of the servants at the police station I let them go, merely asking if they would be kept long, as it was inconvenient to be left without servants. Mr. A. withdrew, promising to send in some one else, and to my surprise two men in uniform appeared—telegraph messengers, I found they were. What we did for food that day I do not remember, probably took refuge with the M.'s; but I have a vivid recollection of finding when I wanted to go to bed that my mosquito curtain had not been let down for the night, and feeling unequal to deal with it scientifically I called up one of the men and made signs that I wanted it done.

He looked at me, and at the bed, as if I had given him a problem too hard to solve. He was an old man who had served in the Crimean War, and it is quite possible that he had never been inside a European house before. Finally he stooped down and took off his boots. Then he climbed up on my bed, and solemnly danced on the bed till the movement had shaken the curtain down all round him. I hastily retired from the scene.

The following morning H. and I went out for a walk together, and having learnt a few words of Arabic I ordered breakfast with eggs to be prepared for our return. On entering the dining-room later we found one egg reposing exactly in the middle of the table, and arranged around it one spoon, one knife, one fork. Nothing else at all, not even a tablecloth on the bare oak. On the whole I did not find office servants a success, and was particularly thankful to see E. back again. He sent orders to the police station for the immediate return of his servants, and they came as they had gone, without any formality of any kind, nor was any attempt made to find the real thief, so far as I know. Before their release the servants had been nearly a week detained in prison, they had been tortured, as we afterwards

discovered, to try and make them confess their guilt, and save the police any further trouble in hunting after the real offender ; and yet to my astonishment Jabr came meekly back and took his place in the kitchen again as if nothing had happened. He asked as a humble favour for five francs to pay for the food he had eaten in prison. We found on inquiry that the prisoners were not supplied with food unless they could pay for it, and that nobody saw anything at all extraordinary in a Pasha's sending his servants to prison whenever it might please him, and taking them out again when he happened to need their services.

While on this subject I will give an account of the second time I was robbed, some nine years later when we had been in charge of the country about four years. It happened at Luxor when I was staying at an hotel with some friends. I had locked up the door of my bedroom and gone out for a walk with the key in my pocket. When I came back all the loose articles on my table had disappeared, and the entire contents of two drawers. It was particularly inconvenient, as it happened, for those two drawers contained the top halves or bodices of all my dresses—and this was before the days of blouses. Dresses

were made from head to foot in the same stuff, and fitted. I was left with the one I stood up in and one white cotton dress, but the next day I went out to tea on a dahabieh in this dress, and a careless native upset the boat. I fell into the Nile, and though I was promptly dragged out again I had to retire to my room, like Laura in *Holiday House*. There were no shops in Luxor then, nor any possibility of buying European clothes.

The same procedure was adopted on this occasion by the native police. It should have been evident to the meanest capacity that my room, which was only a few feet above the ground, had been entered by a window which opened on a public way. There were even the marks where some one had scrambled in; yet when the proprietor of the hotel sent for the police the only thing they did was to arrest the two native servants who were employed in that wing of the hotel and take them off to prison. All the natives of the hotel appealed to me not to let them go, pointing out that it was evident that the thief had entered by the window, and that I had the key of the only door in my pocket. By this time I knew enough Arabic to conduct my own negotiations, and the only reason why I did

not at once order the policemen to release the men was because I thought it became me, as a representative of the new system, to respect the law. So I assured them that no harm was intended, that the servants were only wanted to give evidence, and would soon return. They did not believe me, but submitted respectfully and sorrowfully. The servants did not return, and the proprietor of the hotel came to assure me that he knew they were both respectable men, and that they had had nothing to do with the theft. I quite agreed with him, and said I had no doubt of the result of the inquiry which was doubtless being made. Next day I was informed that the priest of the Coptic Church desired to see me; and found a goodly company of grave and dignified elders waiting to implore my intercession on behalf of the unfortunate servants. I learned for the first time that the men in question were both Christians, and as such I knew there was scant chance of their obtaining justice at the hands of the Mohammedan authorities. Still I assured the priest that things were done differently under the English, and since no one even pretended to believe that the two servants had committed the theft, they must soon be set at liberty.

A day or two passed and the servants did not return. One evening I found three or four women who wailed and beat their breasts on the threshold of my door. They were the wives and mothers of the youths in prison, and they assured me that they were to be sent off as convicts to Kenneh the next morning, and were not likely ever to return. I could hardly believe this, but neither could I ignore the information. I went to the Mohammedan chief of police, and asked if it was true that the two young men would be sent as prisoners to Kenneh the next day, unless I interfered. "Well, Sitt," said the man in the tone of one who states a self-evident proposition, "if you do not interfere I do not know who else will."

"If that is all," I replied, "I will interfere at once."

I went back to my room, and wrote an order in good English for the immediate return of the prisoners. They came—to kiss my hands and call down blessings upon me as their saviour. Nothing more was said about the robbery, and, of course, nothing more was ever heard of my things. I have given instances which happened to ourselves, but they are not singular in the history of the time.

Twenty years afterwards our house was entered in broad daylight, and almost all the ornaments I had acquired in those twenty years were carried off, besides a purse of money, which I had carelessly left on my dressing-table. My husband and I had just sat down to luncheon when I heard the front door close softly. For a moment or two I took no notice, for it was the custom in Cairo for English people to run in and out of Church House as they pleased, and just then one man was coming in to lunch almost every day. As, however, he did not appear, I said to Mohammed, "Go and tell Mr. — we are in the dining-room." Mohammed reported that no one had come in, but I still thought nothing of it till I went upstairs and found my room ransacked. The police made a great fuss, but as usual nothing came of it, and nothing was ever recovered. In this case I think the thief was an expert who had come over from Europe and was probably living at one of the hotels. But I do not think I ever heard of a burglary committed in Cairo during the night, except once, when a few things were snatched from my sister-in-law's bedroom while she lay awake.

THE EVENTS





THE OLD OCTROI MARKET.

CHAPTER IV

THE EVENTS

It is an odd name, and I do not quite know how it grew up, but that is how the revolution of 1882 was always referred to among us in Egypt. A thing had happened "before the events" or "after the events." Now concerning the events I have no personal reminiscences because I was not there, and though I took pains to be well informed immediately afterwards, the information I acquired belongs rather to the region of history, and as such finds its proper place in the two volumes I published after my marriage. Johar was the only member of our household who played any part in the events; and his experiences were duly related in *A Black Jewel*, which I wrote shortly afterwards. But though I was not there during the actual outbreak, I well remember the winter of unrest which preceded it. If we went to an evening party, a whispered rumour would circulate—only half

believed and never justified—that the house had been surrounded by the natives and we were all to be massacred as we went home. On the 23rd of January 1882 I find the entry in my diary : “Rumours of danger all about,” and these gathered force as the events proceeded. For quite six weeks that winter we lived each with a small box packed under orders to be ready to take refuge at the British Agency at a moment’s notice if need arose. But about April things seemed likely to smooth down, and the officials were allowed to go on leave as usual. E. had not been home since he came out in the winter of 1877, and it was particularly important for him to get off early. On the other hand, my youngest brother was coming to us from Australia, and I did not at all like the idea of his coming to find an empty house. So it was arranged that E. should go off alone ; but I had to promise him that I would follow him within the week with the M.’s, unless my other brother turned up by the mail for which I waited. There came instead a letter to say his coming was delayed, so according to promise I flung a few things into a trunk, and just caught the steamer at Alexandria the same afternoon.

This was on the 3rd of May 1882, and the

massacres did not begin at Alexandria till June 11. I could safely have waited after all for my brother of seventeen, who arrived about a fortnight after my departure and proceeded to visit all the places of interest in Cairo with a serene indifference to danger which, as I heard afterwards, was at once the admiration and the despair of certain officials in our department who felt responsible for him.

Indeed, he cannot have left Egypt many days before the smouldering fires broke out. There are two stories of that summer which I do not think I have ever seen in print, relating to the march of the British troops from Cairo.

One concerned the difficulty of finding a guide for the night march across the desert which preceded Tel el-Kebir. The British force had ascertained the whereabouts of the Egyptian camp, and knew that the way must lie across the desert; but no one had been that way, and no native guide could be trusted. In this dilemma a young officer offered to lead the army by the stars, and the whole expedition was thus entrusted to his care. I cannot remember his name.¹ But I know that after abundantly

¹ It has been suggested to me that the name was Lieutenant Rawson.

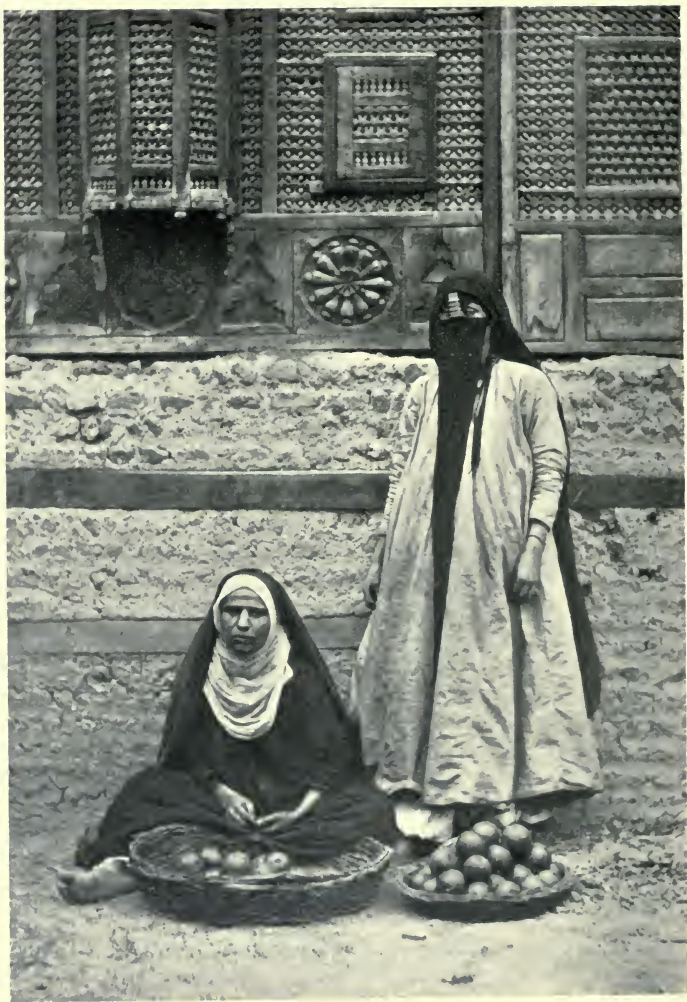
justifying the confidence placed in him he was mortally wounded during the battle, and his colonel went in haste to see him. The young man's face lighted up as his senior officer came in. "I led them straight, didn't I, sir?" he said, and so died.

The other story relates to the first Highland regiment that had been seen in Egypt within the memory of man. They were for some reason encamped apart from the rest of the force, and the natives took it into their heads that these were the wives of the English soldiers left unguarded. The Oriental imagination determined that the chance was too good to be missed, and hastily arranged an expedition to carry off the women. I have heard that they were very much astonished at the reception they met. After that they changed their minds, and told each other that among these incomprehensible English the short petticoat was a robe of honour, and only given to those who had proved their bravery in fighting.

The sand castle of civilisation, according to Ismail, having been swept away, a new era of construction began. So entirely had the native army disappeared that when the young officer of Marines who had saved the life of the Khedive

during the bombardment of Alexandria, was told to take charge of the Egyptian army at Abbassieh, he found his entire force to consist of one man. I found this out when he complained to me that he had told his army to black his boots, and that the army had refused to a man.

CHOLERA STORIES



ORANGE SELLERS.

CHAPTER V

CHOLERA STORIES

WE came back to a very different Cairo. English redcoats were everywhere, and just that first winter of the occupation the individual importance of the English residents was rather increased than diminished. Lord Dufferin came over from Constantinople, and managed to attend to matters of real importance in Cairo in spite of the necessity for drawing up an Egyptian constitution on paper to send home to the English Parliament. He begun the series of reports which, under Lord Cromer, have taken rank of the first importance for the recent history of Egypt. Lord Dufferin's report is almost more interesting to read now than it was then, in the light of subsequent events. But very soon more serious themes than the popular representation of Egypt under Parliamentary government absorbed our attention. The unhappy country had lately known war, famine—

of a kind which would now arrest the attention of the civilised world, but then passed almost without remark—and now she was to know pestilence. Not that pestilence was a new thing in Egypt; again and again we read of terrible plagues during the centuries of misgovernment and oppression which followed the conquest of Egypt by the Moslems. The true plague, in Egypt at any rate, is a species of hunger-fever, and has always, so far as I can discover, been preceded by famine due either to drought or a state of misgovernment which has wasted and destroyed the crops. It is to be hoped that we shall never know what this form of plague can be so long as the British occupation lasts, though we have had one or two outbreaks of a milder form of plague. In the tenth century when a plague of this kind broke out after a long famine it is recorded that 600,000 perished in the three towns of Babylon, Fostat, and Masr alone, “not counting the corpses which were thrown into the river.” The same story recurs century after century, either cholera or plague sweeps away in a few months uncounted hundreds of thousands. In the last two centuries the record has been better, and the last great pestilence before our arrival was in 1865. But all the conditions

were ripe for such an outbreak when we came. All through 1882 and the early part of 1883, in addition to all their other troubles, the Egyptians had suffered from cattle plague. When the beasts died the natives took off their skins, and flung the diseased carcasses not only into the Nile, but into the *drinking water canals*. We English cried out in horror, and month by month called upon the Egyptian authorities to put a stop to this suicidal folly, but to no purpose. There was even a tax imposed of about three shillings a head for every beast which the natives should bury in the ground, though I know this sounds almost incredible to English readers. So, of course, the dead bodies were still thrown into the water, and the water was drunk, and the people remained filthy, and the cholera came.

It first appeared in Damietta, where the rotting carcasses drifted into heaps in the shallow water, and were fed upon by fish, which the people caught and ate. The native authorities had but one idea, not to cure or prevent the cholera, but to hinder it from spreading farther, and especially from reaching Cairo. To effect this, as each town or village of importance was attacked, they put a "cordon" or ring of armed native police round the place to prevent any one

from coming out. This cordon was no sort of use, it never in any instance prevented the cholera from slowly and surely fastening upon every wretched village that was ripe for it; but so long as they merely kept the people in the town it did not do much harm. Besides, if a native wanted to leave the town and had any money, he had only to bribe the policeman in an unofficered part of the cordon with a few piastres, and he could always get out. Mansourah suffered terribly; after a time the provisions begun to fail, and the cordon prevented the fellaheen round about from bringing supplies. There were a few English in the town who were doing what they could, and they sent urgent telegrams for help to Cairo and Alexandria. The English in both places, and the Khedive Tewfik also in Cairo, promptly responded to the appeal, and sent train after train laden with provisions and medicines to Mansourah. It will scarcely be believed that for *several days* during which the people were dying of starvation as well as cholera, these medicines and provisions could not be got past the cordon into Mansourah. Generally, however, the authorities were quite willing to allow the English "fools" to pass through their cordons, into the cholera-stricken

towns, so long as they were not called upon to go themselves, and so long as the foreigners did not want to come out again.

One day an urgent telegram came to Cairo from Shebin el Kom., then a small place where there was a handful of Europeans and a native town. The cholera had come there ; three of the Europeans were already dead in a few hours, and they wanted help ; they had neither a doctor nor medicines. It was impossible to spare a doctor from Cairo, no one knew when he would be let out again, and it was feared that it would be impossible to find a messenger who would go with the required help. However, a young Englishman, who is still among us, came forward and offered to take the medicines and stay to nurse the people. After a good deal of trouble he succeeded in entering the village, and stayed there some weeks. That town was very slightly touched with cholera after all. Mr. Hooker treated twenty-eight cases, but out of those twenty-eight he lost only one.

Then we heard it had come to Cairo, and the next day we were in the midst of it. It first showed itself in Boulak where there were then but few English. The native authorities were told that the only way to stamp out the cholera

in Boulak would be to build the people fresh huts outside the town ; and then burn down the old huts, which were so utterly bad and dirty that if the cholera once got into them it would never get out. One Englishman who employed some hundreds of natives, at once built new huts for his people outside the town, took them there and then burned down the old rotten huts.

But the native authorities took the suggestion in rather a different way. They made no provision whatever for the wretched people, but one dark night they sent mounted policemen to drive them all out at once from their homes, to which they set fire behind them. The wretched plague-stricken people, men, women and children, hastily gathered up their household goods, and were driven out from their burning homes without food or shelter. The English, of course, did not know of this till it was too late ; or they would have prevented it. Some of these people succeeded in escaping from the desert, where they had been driven, and came in to Cairo itself, where they spread the cholera in quarters which might otherwise have escaped. A few of them took refuge in a half-empty building, part of which was inhabited by a Frenchman. This man, instead of doing what

he could to help them, brought down his gun, and pointing it at them, told them he would shoot them unless they moved on directly.

The whole town was in a state of panic ; very few of the native doctors would go near a cholera patient. In the new Egyptian army many of the soldiers died, and none of their comrades would go near them. They would have died like dogs, had not the English officers nursed and cared for them as if they had been their own people. On one occasion when a man was very ill, and no doctor could be found except a native one, who refused to come, two of the English officers went and took that doctor by force, brought him to the man's bedside, and held him there till he prescribed for the man.

I am aware that this does not sound like the fatalism of the Mohammedan east, and the worst cases of panic were generally, I think, among low class Europeans ; but certainly the natives did not show that confidence in Allah or indifference to danger that one would have looked for. I suppose a good deal of the cowardice they showed must have been caused by a profound fear and distrust of us as Christians. In the less severe epidemics of cholera we have had since that time I have

always noticed that it is the remedies, and not the cholera itself, of which the natives are afraid. It seems impossible to persuade the uneducated Oriental that those who are trying to prevent the spread of a disease are not, if they happen to be of a different faith, really trying to increase it. Government officials are generally objects of distrust in Egypt, even if they are not Christians. The following stories, overheard in the trams or repeated to English people by their servants in the outbreak of 1896, will illustrate this feeling.

One morning a melon seller brought a cart full of fine melons to sell in the city. But as he sold in the street there came one to him saying, "What do you, selling these melons. There is death in them, and you must not sell any more."

"There is no death in my melons," answered the melon seller. "They are good melons, as you may see for yourself."

"Nevertheless if you eat them you will die," said the stranger. "See now, I will cut one of your melons and you shall eat of it, and in three hours you will die."

"You lie," said the melon seller, "and I will show you what I will do. Here are my friends

and they shall see also. Behold I will cut a melon, but I will cut it with my knife and not with yours, and I will eat of it with my friends also, and we will watch together three hours, and there shall be no death among us."

So they held the stranger that he should not depart; and the melon seller divided a melon and he ate of it, and his friends likewise. And they waited three hours, but there was not one dead. Then they rose up and took the stranger to the police station with his knife, and behold the knife with which he would have cut the melons was poisoned.

A certain Bey had a son who fell ill of cholera. The Bey called in a doctor who gave him some pills, saying, "Give the child two of these now: I will come again this evening." But after three hours the boy died. When the doctor came, the Bey said to him, "How is it that my child, who was not very ill, is dead? And how shall I tell his mother?" The doctor replied, "Perhaps he is asleep, do not tell his mother to-night: I will come again in the morning."

The next morning, when the doctor arrived, the suffragi brought him a cup of coffee, into which the Bey had secretly dropped two of the

pills which his child should have taken. The doctor drank it, and after three hours he died ; upon which the Bey gave himself up to the police, saying, "I have killed this man with the pills with which he killed my child." And he offered the remaining pills for inspection.

A young seller of arr'-es-sous (a sweet drink made of liquorice) was walking along the road carrying a jar of his stock in trade, when he was accosted by a person whom he took to be a doctor.

"Let me put this powder into your jar," said the doctor, showing him a white powder.

"No," replied the man. "You shall not put that into my jar."

"Never mind," then said the doctor, "here are two pounds for you : now let me put it in."

"Certainly," replied the man ; and forthwith the doctor did so.

No sooner had the doctor departed, than the seller, having received his two pounds, went off, broke his jar, and proceeded to buy a new one with part of the spoil, no doubt thinking he had done a fine day's work, having both frustrated the wicked doctor's intention of poisoning the natives, and made a nice little sum for himself.

One evening Fatma, daughter of Ahmed the

dye, was sent for some beans for the family's supper. She got the beans and was returning home when a man stopped her and asked her what she was carrying.

"Sir," said she, "I am taking home some beans for our supper," and she showed them to him.

"And where do you live?"

"I live with my father, Ahmed the dye, in the first house in that street," indicating one a short distance off.

"How many are there of you in the house?" asked the man.

"We number ten in all."

Having got this information out of her, he said—

"You are a good girl, here is backsheesh for you."

While talking he had, observed by the girl, put a white powder on the beans. When she got home she told her father all that had happened, and he refused to eat the beans, or to allow his family to do so. The next morning the beans were full of maggots.

About eight o'clock there was a loud knocking at the door, Fatma opened it, and went and told Ahmed that it was the man who had put the

powder in the beans and he had a cart and sanitary inspectors with him. When Ahmed went to the door the man said he wanted the ten bodies of the people who had died of cholera in the night. He was told that there was nobody dead in the house, and refused to believe it. Then Ahmed called all his family and said, "We did not eat those beans you put the powder in, so we are all alive ; go now and take the cart with you and don't try to put powder in our food again."

I always found the story of ——'s cook very pathetic, and never could understand why many people roared with laughter when my husband told it.

An Englishman of very high rank in the Egyptian service wished to give a dinner party in his own house to the Prime Minister and various other Egyptian and English notables. He was a bachelor and did not often entertain, but he spoke to his servants and told them that he particularly wished the dinner to be a success. You can always count on your Egyptian, or rather Berberin servants, in any domestic crisis. They have a quick sense for the honour of "our" house, as every good servant will say of his master's abode.

So the servants bestirred themselves and the guests sat down to an excellent dinner beautifully arranged. Good fish succeeded good soup, and then there was a pause. The host talked his best, but began to feel nervous. However, after a delay hardly long enough to attract the notice of the guests, the even procession of dishes recommenced and the evening was a great success. After the guests had departed the host said a word of praise to his head servant, and then remarked—

“By the way there was rather a long wait after the fish. Why was that?”

“May it please your Excellency the cook died of cholera.”

What!!

But investigation put the fact beyond a doubt. The cook, attacked at the last moment, and anxious for the honour of the house, had worked on till he fell dead at his post, and when that happened his body was hastily laid aside and the marmiton rose to the occasion and finished cooking the dinner. I heard this story after the Englishman in question had left the country. I never heard that any of the guests suffered, or knew what had happened.

ABU SEFAYN





A TOWNSWOMAN.

CHAPTER VI

ABU SEFAYN

IN 1887 my brother married, and for more than a year I was absent from Egypt. Part of this time I spent in Spain, and was interested to trace the Arabic words and customs which lingered there. But it is a true saying that whoso drinks of the waters of the Nile returns to it again, and the winter of 1888 found me once more in Egypt. I had already begun those studies which afterwards resulted in the publication of my *History of the Egyptian Church*; having first been led to take an interest in the subject by Dean Butcher, whom I afterwards married, and Dr. Butler, author of *The Ancient Coptic Churches of Egypt*, who came to Egypt as tutor to the present Khedive, and who was a great friend of my husband's. At first, like every one else, I was too much absorbed in the Egypt of the Pharaohs to care much about their degenerate descendants,

but it gradually dawned on me that I was taking their degeneracy too much for granted, and that when it came to a question of facts no one really seemed to know anything about them. But I never thought about writing anything on the subject myself till, in the course of some lectures I was giving on Egyptian history, I came to the period between Julius Cæsar and the Arab Conquest and found myself confronted by a blank, so far as any available authorities in English were concerned. There were a few histories dealing with the Fathers of the Early Church, who were mostly, as I realised with a shock of surprise, neither Greek nor Latin, but Egyptian, and that was all. When in the course of years I had laboriously amassed a certain amount of information, it occurred to me that some sort of handbook of the period was really wanted and that I might as well try to write it. To facilitate further studies I wished to make friends with the present-day Copts, other than Government officials; and, knowing how suspicious long centuries of oppression had made them, I was puzzled at first how to approach them without making them at once retire behind that impenetrable barrier of polite acquiescence

which the Oriental knows so well how to assume.

I had already an acquaintance with the priest of Abu Sefayn, one of the oldest Christian churches in Fostat (now called Old Cairo), and I knew that he was a good specimen of an intelligent and broad-minded Egyptian, unspoiled by contact with the ragged fringe of Western civilisation. He was a widower and forbidden by the laws of his Church to marry again, so his little daughter Miriam, then about fifteen, looked after his house, his mother, an old lady past work, and a brother named Ferid, who about that time had lost his young wife and two children. One was a baby son, who died with his mother; the other, a beautiful baby girl with the lovely blue eyes sometimes found among the Copts, sickened and died a few months afterwards. There is not much hope for Egyptian babies of either religion if the mother dies. I was struck by the great astonishment and interest evinced by the natives when the young wife of an Englishman died leaving a baby of a few weeks old, and the father instead of waiting for the child to follow its mother, immediately engaged a trained hospital nurse to take entire charge of it.

The nurse in question was a personal friend of mine and often brought the baby to my house, where it was an object of great attention from my servants. When several months had passed and the baby, instead of dying, thrived and prospered under the care of a woman who could only give it milk out of a bottle, they could not refrain from the expression of their surprise.

“With us, you know, Sitt, that baby *must* have died,” they ended. The child was a son, else they would have been still more astonished at the father’s proceedings.

Miriam’s widowed brother, Ferid, soon married another pretty girl of fourteen, named Bahia, who was so miserable and homesick that she used to sit up in the corner of a divan most of the time, hardly speaking ; so that poor Miriam’s hands were fuller than ever. Her principal companions were a family of fatherless children who were under the guardianship of her father. There were two girls, Salome and Sophia—pronounced in Egypt Saluma and Sophia, with the *i* sounded as we sound *e* ; and three boys, one of whom, Abd el Melek, became afterwards my pupil. When in course of time he managed to acquire sufficient education to be taken on as

pupil teacher in the Government School, he used to write me letters from the various towns to which he was sent by way of improving his English.

I had noticed that the stoles worn by the choir boys in Abu Sefayn were in very bad condition, and it occurred to me that if I offered to help the girls to do some work for their church it would be a good way of making acquaintance. The priest already knew me as a person who was really interested in the Egyptian Church ; so I called on him in his private house and offered to give the material for some new stoles, and come and show the girls how to embroider them if he would arrange for me to have a working party at his house once a week. Having obtained his consent, I had next to find a helper, for I knew nothing of embroidery myself. But I was fortunate enough to find a very pretty English girl who had been brought up in the country and could speak Arabic perfectly, besides knowing how to embroider, and being most kindly, ready to help. The Egyptian girls from first to last never called me by my name. I was first " the great lady," and after my marriage " the lady belonging to the great priest." But Sitt Rosa and, after her marriage, another English girl who kindly came to my help, Sitt Edwina, soon

won and always retained their affectionate admiration.

We had a good many girls at different times, but most of them left off coming to the working party when they married, and their place was taken by younger ones who had to begin from the beginning. We generally sat on the roof of the high narrow house for the sake of the fresh air, but sometimes it was too cold, and then we sat in the best room, the only one really furnished to European eyes, where all honoured guests were received. It was also the highest room in the house, so we had to stumble up a long and narrow stone stair to get to it. On the ground floor of the house there was nothing but a bare entry and an oven chamber, where all the bread for the church, as well as for the house, was prepared.

The old Bishop of Khartoum took refuge in Abu Sefayn when the dervishes took Khartoum, and brought safely away with him several women, among whom were two negress converts to Christianity. When the English reconquered Khartoum, a new bishop—the old one having died in the interim—and some priests were sent up at once by the Egyptian Patriarch; and our party embroidered a covering for the altar of the

new church which it was his first charge to rebuild. The old one, of course, had been destroyed by the dervishes and most of the Christians massacred. I embroidered—having learned how—the five Coptic crosses in gold on the centre panel of white silk, four girls did the corners, four others the side pieces, and Sitt Edwina embroidered the connecting links round the centre piece with Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, in four languages—English, Greek, Coptic, and Arabic.

Considering that I am writing in Egypt of things Egyptian, it will surprise no one to learn that Abu Sefayn is not really the name either of the church or the man so-called. The real name of the church of Abu Sefayn is St. Mercurius, the real name of the priest, whom we call Abu Sefayn, is Abd el Melek, or Servant of the King. And that again is probably merely the translation of his proper Christian name, just as Abd el Messiah is only a translation, for common use, of Christodulos. I know one man who was christened Marcus, and is habitually called Skander, another who was christened Vasili (the Eastern form of Basil), and is always known as Zeki. But of this curious custom and the reason for it I have spoken in another place.

The nickname of the church is the nickname of the saint to whom it is dedicated. Abu Sefayn, being translated, means "The father of two swords." I had been much interested in the legends of the Egyptian saints, and I had observed that in the cases where the saint had been one of the early converts from paganism and bore a pagan name, a later generation of Christians had refused to know them by that name, though their contemporaries seem to have had no scruples on this score. In the church of St. Sergius and St. Bacchus, the uppermost of the two churches, one above another, which the tourists are taken to see, the two saints are represented in the same ancient picture, but poor Bacchus is never mentioned now. The church is only spoken of among the Copts as Abu Sergeh, and among the dragomen more often by the entirely wrong name of Mari Girghis. The saint to whom Abu Sefayn is dedicated was a convert and martyr of the time of Decius, and his name was Mercury, or Mercurius. In all the pictures of this saint he is represented holding two swords crossed above his head, with the crowned and prostrate figure of Julian the Apostate under the hoofs of his horse. The picture commemorates, not the

martyrdom of the saint, but his appearance to Bishop Basil of Cappadocia more than a hundred years afterwards.

When I first knew the Deyr of Abu Sefayn it stood alone in that most desolate of deserts, the broken heaps of a destroyed native town. It is still only to be entered by one low doorway in the wall within which the Christian community lives its separate life. There is only one path in the Deyr broad enough for more than two people to walk abreast, and that leads between the blank walls of high houses to the church of Abu Sefayn—not the only church within the Deyr—and beyond to the priest's house. There are no shops, nor is any business carried on inside the Deyr. The men of the place go out every morning to their work in the Moslem city of Cairo, and return to their secluded homes at night. The houses are so high that no sun, except at midday, can shine into this street or alley.

A little beyond the priest's house is a convent of nuns, under the charge of a charming old Mother Superior. There are not many convents in Egypt, and those that exist are practically religious homes provided by the Church for the poorer women whose families have not been

able to give them in marriage. On most of the inmates the conventional rules are only binding so long as they remain in the care of the Mother Superior. One of Miriam's orphan friends, Salome, was a good deal among the nuns, and she was the only one, I think, of our girls who did not marry. Her younger sister, Sophia, went to one of the new Coptic schools, which much increased her matrimonial value. Her guardian, the priest, had at least four proposals of marriage for her before she was sixteen ; but though it would have been a relief to him to have one of the family provided for, he refused to allow her to marry in childhood.

The girls soon became very friendly with us, and used to come to tea with me either in the Zoological Gardens, which delighted them immensely, or in Church House garden. I had to send a servant to fetch them, and escort them back again, and they came shrouded to the eyes like Mohammedan women, but once in my care they laid their veils aside and enjoyed themselves. They had beautiful manners, gentle voices and sweet faces, but only one or two of them were really pretty. After a time I learned enough about their fast days not to embarrass them. If I asked them to come on a fast day,

which I did once or twice at first without knowing, they were much too polite to expose my ignorance. They came and sat smilingly refusing all the delicacies I had prepared for them, but at last I discovered what was the matter and took pains to find out beforehand what days they were forbidden to eat my cakes.

Most of my Egyptian maidens kept strictly all the fasts of their Church, and some of them suffered seriously in health. I did at last persuade Miriam's father that if he wanted to keep his daughter alive he must give her a dispensation from fasting, and he did so, but Miriam did not avail herself of the permission as often as she should, and was always on the verge of a breakdown. Yet I never saw her idle or out of temper. Her great fear was that her father, to whom she was devoted, would feel it his duty to give her in marriage, which at length and very reluctantly he did the pressure of public opinion being too strong for him. But he had the strength of mind to break off the first engagement when it became evident that to persist in it would be to make Miriam miserable; and eventually, I am glad to say, a husband was found for her who did seem likely to value and cherish her as she deserved.

Miriam's wedding, however, was the last celebrated among the little band of maidens whom for some years we taught and from whom we learnt much. The first of their more or less private religious functions which we were asked to attend was the christening of Bahia's third baby, a little daughter. Her two elder children were sons, Shafi and Athanasius, but the second only survived his birth a few weeks. By this time poor Bahia had become reconciled to her new home, though I think Miriam had more to do with it than her husband, and she was both fond and proud of her eldest son—only fifteen years her junior. My husband and the Little Old Lady—of whom more anon—accompanied me to the christening.

AN EGYPTIAN CHRISTENING





A COUNTRY-WOMAN.

CHAPTER VII

AN EGYPTIAN CHRISTENING

IN due time Ferid and Abd el Melek, the father and godfather-to-be of the child concerned, called to give me the ceremonious invitation to the christening which I had promised to attend. I found that it was not to take place in Abu Sefayn ; but in the church where Bahia's relations belonged. This was the church of the Archangel Michael of the North, in the village of Demerdache (Timur Tash), to which there is no road. But I knew by experience that our coachman would be equal to the occasion, so on the appointed Monday the Dean, the Little Old Lady, and myself drove out of Cairo. We crossed crumbling and unguarded bridges, we sidled along a sloping sandbank with a wall on one hand and a deep canal on the other ; we backed and turned in the marvellous way known only to Arab coachmen ; and finally he put his horses straight at a rail-

way embankment, up which they scrambled like cats. A dash across the rails, a plunge downwards, and we were spinning along a camel track between maize and cotton, and, after another jerk and a final spurt, we thundered through the gates of the Deyr in fine style.

The baby had not yet arrived, but the service for the day was in progress, and we waited in the church till a series of cries announced that the christening party awaited us in the baptistery, a small room at the south-east corner, with a separate entrance, and open on one side the sanctuary. Here the women of the christening party were assembled; almost every one sat on the floor, but the Little Old Lady and I sat in two red and gold arm-chairs which had been specially brought in, while the Dean and the priest of Abu Sefayn sat on ordinary chairs. All the women wore the black habara, but as they were safe within Christian walls their faces were unveiled. The font was one of those often found in Egyptian churches, the hollowed stump of a large stone pillar from the ruins of an earlier church. Abuna Butros (Father Peter), who conducted the first part of the service,

was in his ordinary robes and wore no vestment.

Bahia was called, and, rising with her baby, stood before the priest. Abuna Butros repeated over her the prayer of purification; then, having asked the baby's name, pronounced it aloud, and proceeded to exorcise the evil spirit from the infant. This was done by prayer and breathing upon her. Mother and child were then anointed upon the forehead, and the child also upon the palms of her tiny hands.

Bahia now withdrew, and the young godfather took the baby out of her arms. I expected screams, but evidently the baby knew Abd el Melek, and she smiled serenely at him as he repeated over her head the formula of renunciation and confession of faith. Then the baby was given to Bahia to undress, while Abuna Butros consecrated the water with prayer and the sign of the cross three times made with a silver hand-cross. I believe the second oil was also dropped upon the water in the form of a cross, and the priest breathed upon the water.

At this juncture the priest, who had been reading the life of Arrian when we arrived

to the scanty congregation, was called in from the sanctuary in his white robes for the actual administration of the Sacrament—I imagine because he was the only priest present who was still fasting. Little Dimiana, naked, and loudly protesting, was handed back to her godfather, while the clothing she had put off was hurried out of sight. The officiating priest took her in the extremely awkward fashion prescribed by ritual, and Dimiana's cries during the thrice-repeated immersion drowned the words of the formula. Then the priest rolled her loosely in a large silk handkerchief and laid her flat on the floor, while he anointed her with the oil of thanksgiving.

The baby was then put into the arms of her godfather, who squatted on the floor to receive her, and she subsided at once into silence, though her trials were by no means over. For no one but the priest, with the help of the godfather, must dress the child after baptism in its new white robes, and, as a rule, two or even one garment is all that is necessary. But Bahia, in the pride of her young motherhood, had made and embroidered a whole set of new white garments, after the fashion of an English

baby's clothing. These she now produced, to the evident embarrassment of both priest and godfather. It was really very funny to see Abd el Melek and the dignified Abuna Butros sitting on the floor with the baby between them solemnly staring from one to the other while the two men earnestly endeavoured to get all the various garments on the right way. Bahia crouched silently beside them, longing to do it herself, but not daring to interfere. Properly speaking, the child should have worn only these white garments, but at the last moment Bahia produced a gorgeous new pelisse of red and yellow silk, which the priest good-naturedly put on over all. But when she further handed to him a white bib, such as all English babies wear, he was fairly nonplussed. "Now, what is this?" he ejaculated, holding it out in both hands. "Is it a hood?"

Fortunately Abd el Melek was equal to the occasion, and promptly tied it round the baby's neck. Then came the ancient ceremony which is peculiar to the baptismal formula of the Church of Egypt, and gave the Egyptian Christians the nickname by which in the later Middle Ages they were distinguished—"Children

of the Belt." The little one was solemnly invested by the priest with a tri-coloured ribbon representing a sword-belt, in token that she was prepared to defend the faith in the Triune God or die for it, as the Lord might call upon her. This belt must only be put on by the priest, and taken off again by no one but him. It used to be left on the child for three days, but is now loosed from the infant when the final blessing is given. Immediately after this ceremony Dimiana was brought to be blessed by the Dean, and then given back to her mother.

The service of the Holy Communion was then proceeded with, but for this we all returned into the church, except the native women, who were left sitting on the ground in the baptistery, from whence they could all see the altar. Our arm-chairs were carried before us into the church; for the Egyptians are not supposed to sit during Divine service, and the chairs were at once a concession to our weakness and a tribute to our importance. Only one member of the congregation received the Sacrament besides the priest, the deacon, and the newly baptized child, and that was Ibrahim Bey, a man of some wealth

and importance, who had recently rebuilt the church at his own expense. Unfortunately for the archæologist, the gratitude of wealthy Copts to God for the safety and prosperity they have enjoyed since the coming of the English has so often taken this form that already there are few unrestored churches to be found.

During the previous service we had seen Ibrahim Bey in frock-coat, grey trousers, white waistcoat, and spectacles, a figure which would have looked far less incongruous in the streets of London than squatting on the floor of an Egyptian church. Since then he had struggled, evidently with some difficulty, into the ecclesiastical garment of white, embroidered with red, which, like the wedding garment of the New Testament, must be worn by those who come to the Lord's Table; and he was pacing slowly round the altar behind the young deacon, carrying a lighted taper.

When all these had received, the baby was called for, and held in her godfather's arms while the priest administered the Sacrament with a spoon. Dimiana did not seem to mind what various experiences she was called upon to undergo, so long as she felt her-

self safe in the arms of Abd el Melek or her mother.

When the long service was finished a gorgeous cope was brought out, with which Abd el Melek, the baby still in his arms, was solemnly invested. Then the silver processional cross, with a lighted taper fixed on its head and each arm, was borne before him by the deacon, and the baptismal procession moved, chanting the while, three times round the church. Then Abd el Melek stood in the archway of the sanctuary portal, holding Dimiana to the priest for the final blessing and dismissal.

Once more we followed our arm-chairs and found them occupying the post of honour at the reception in the courtyard. Ferid and the other younger men served us with lemonade and sweets, while the priests desired to enter into conversation with us. But as I was the only English person present who knew any Arabic, and Abd el Melek the only Egyptian who knew any English, we did not get very far. The women were served separately, but I insisted on going to see them before we made our elaborate farewells to the men-kind and were escorted by them to the entrance of the Deyr. The infant heroine of the occasion did not live more

than a year or two. Bahia has borne three sons and two daughters, but only her eldest son and youngest daughter, a very handsome child who was christened Rosa, now remain to her.

**THE BETROTHAL OF
SOPHIA**



THE CITADEL.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BETROTHAL OF SOPHIA

OF the three Egyptian girls whom we knew best, Sophia was the first to marry, and the news of her betrothal was conveyed to me in the following letter from her brother, Abd el Melek. I have not altered anything except a word or two where his still imperfect knowledge of English obscured the sense too much.

“Sophia, my sister, will be married the Sunday after next. As I know that you wish to be acquainted with the manner in which the Egyptian marriage is carried on, I take this opportunity to tell you about everything that I observed.

“About a week ago, when I was in my study, there came two old women with a young married lady into the room where I was sitting. Being ashamed (too shy) to meet them, I took my book and got out of the room; but called upon my mother to come and receive them. I was

afterwards informed that one of them was a midwife and the other the grandmother of a young Copt who accompanied them up to the house but waited outside. The young lady was his aunt. They all came with intention to see Sophia and to describe to the youth her personal and other qualifications. So poor Sophia was ordered to be dressed out to the best advantage. The wives and daughters of our neighbours hurried to our house and assisted her. Soon after she appeared in full state, with her hair curled and arranged dexterously over the eyes, with long gloves on, and with many adornments and other numerous devices which were to be as so many arrows to the heart of the bridegroom. The two old women drew her close into their bosoms one after the other, flung their arms round her neck, embraced and kissed her. They did that in order to feel her breast and smell the odour of her mouth. They make her speak to see if she had a clear and sonorous voice. They watched her when she laughed, but found that her mouth was not too wide and that her teeth were all whole and nicely arranged. The young lady remarked that Sophia was perspiring, and so took out a handkerchief and wiped her face ; but the truth was

that she wanted to see whether the complexion of Sophia's face was naturally or artificially white. They were all convinced to their entire satisfaction as to Sophia's physical beauty. Then they began to test her knowledge of the rules of etiquette. When she handed them the cups of coffee they turned their eyes towards her to witness how she offered the cup to each. Sophia was on her guard, for she nicely stepped towards them with the cup, held by its bottom rim in her hand, and then turned back again, stood erect and crossed her arms on her breast. When they drank the coffee she took the cup and complimented them very civilly. This behaviour of hers pleased them to the highest degree, and they soon proclaimed their wish to have her for a wife to the young man whom they represented. The midwife was sent out to give him her report of what she had seen and to bring him in. She described to him the girl as being like a gazelle, pretty and elegant and young. When she talked to him about her manners, she compared her to an angel or to a Turkish girl born and brought up in Constantinople (!). My mother, meanwhile, went to my uncle the priest and gave him notice. I was also called to be present and give my advice in the matter.

“The reception hall was prepared, and my uncle sat in it waiting for the arrival of his guests. The expectant youth was led to it by the midwife. They all took their seats on the sofa, the young married lady being by the priest. Mother took a chair a little way from him. The intended bridegroom and I sat at the table. I sat musing and watching closely the small occurrences that fell under my observation while my would-be brother-in-law was anxious to see the face of his future wife and to have a glance at the beauty that had been described to him. My uncle after giving the due welcome to his visitors, commanded that Sophia should show herself again. My cousin's wife brought her out of one of the rooms to the scene of action. She trod the pavement as if she were going to immediate execution. She summoned up courage enough to shake hands with us all, not even the man excepted, and to entertain us by reading a chapter from the Bible. Signs of satisfaction could be seen on the countenance of my uncle, for the old man was more jealous for the future of his daughters and nieces than for that of his sons and nephews. I listened with amusement while he spared no words to extol her beauty and conduct. He made them

understand that our daughters do not spoil their husbands or lead them astray. They honour and serve their mothers-in-law from their hearts. He also said that there is no single case which shows that one of the daughters of our house divided her husband from his father or asked the Ecclesiastical Court to help her in obtaining an inhabitaney or a legal house.¹

“The midwife or Khatiba, as she is commonly called, smiled all the while, talked in whispers with the other ladies (probably commenting on the charms of Sophia), and nodded an assent at the end of each phrase my uncle said. She then took Sophia aside and said to her, ‘My daughter, the youth who wishes to marry you is young, graceful and elegant, as you see him. He has

¹ This sentence will be obscure to those who do not know Egyptian customs. It is usual for two or three generations of them to inhabit the family house. When a son marries, instead of “leaving his father and his mother,” as St. Paul recommended, he brings his wife to the common home; and she is expected to become, in a very literal sense, one of his family. But it is provided that if the woman finds her position unbearable, she may appeal to the Ecclesiastical Court, and they have power to order the husband to take a separate house for her. But this is considered an extreme measure, only excused by very strong evidence that the young woman is justified in her complaint. If she makes the application without such sufficient grounds, she is considered to have disgraced herself and her family.

plenty of money, dresses handsomely, is fond of delicacies, but cannot enjoy his luxuries alone; he wants you as his companion; he will give you everything that money can procure; he is a stayer-at-home, and will spend his whole time with you, caressing and fondling you.' But neither the man nor Sophia could ever lift eyes to one another, a fact which surprised me very much. Both of them seemed blinded with shame, and I wondered how he saw her, and upon what ground he chose her for wife. I think the account of her given by the two old women satisfied him; and the eulogium of her character given by so worthy a man as my uncle had its due effect upon him. Now both parties began to settle the amount of the 'mahr,' or marriage settlement, which he was prepared to make. After a little haggling, as in other pecuniary transactions, they at length agreed to fix it at £50. The next Sunday was appointed for paying the money and performing the ceremony of the betrothal, which is properly called 'Kirayet Gabaniot' (or the reading of the Lord's Prayer). On inquiring who the young aspirant was, we found him to be a carpenter in the irrigation shops near the Barrage, under the superintendence of his father, who is the fore-

man of all the carpenters there. He is paid twenty-four piastres a day, and his father's salary is £12 a month. He and his father are living together in a house of their own. On the day appointed for writing the contract, the bridegroom accompanied by his father, brothers and friends, came to our house bringing with him the dowry which he had promised to pay. He and his companions were received by the bride's 'wakeel.' My uncle and many friends of the latter were present. The bridegroom then paid the money. The service of betrothal was performed and substantiated by many witnesses. Another priest besides my uncle was employed on this occasion. All persons present then recited in an audible voice the Lord's Prayer, and sang the hymn of the 'King.' The contract concluded, the people who were present were served with 'sherbet' or syrup and coffee. The bridegroom and his friends remained to dinner, while all others dispersed. Concerning the dowry I may say two or three words more. It was expended in furnishing Sophia with the necessary outfits. We prepared for her a stock of household furniture (as sofas, matting, carpets, bedding, kitchen utensils, etc.), and dress. She had her ornaments before. We found the dowry

insufficient, and so we ourselves supplied additional money to make her 'gahaz,' that is, the articles of furniture, complete. A rich bride is known from a poor one by her outfits. Amongst the lowest classes of the peasantry the bride enters into her bridegroom's house with a hand-mill, a mat, and an earthen cooking vessel."

I was not present at Sophia's wedding, but a few years afterwards I went to see Miriam married in her father's church.

MIRIAM'S WEDDING



MIRIAM.

CHAPTER IX

MIRIAM'S WEDDING

MIRIAM was married in summer, and it was a very hot day when the Little Old Lady and I drove down to Abu Sefayn for the ceremony. When we entered the Deyr we found the narrow lane decorated with palms and flags and hung with lanterns in readiness for the evening festivities. The lane was tented in for half its length, and the inevitable brass band was in attendance, greeting our appearance with a noisy clash of welcome. We looked into the church, which was already lighted up, with a special wedding altar erected in front of the door in the beautiful old chancel screen. Both bride and bridegroom had made their communion in the early morning, and the sanctuary is not used for the actual wedding ceremony. The priest begged me to come and see Miriam, so I went out again with Abd el Melek to show me the way, for Miriam was not in her father's house. The bridegroom

being a stranger from a far country (about sixty miles away) had to be provided with a house for the wedding ceremonies, so the priest's house had been made over to him. Miriam therefore had to be taken out of it, and was lodging in the house of a neighbouring priest, which became for the occasion the house of the bride's father. Both Abu Sefayn and his daughter were miserable at the parting, which they had put off as long as public opinion would permit.

I found poor Miriam white as death, and bearing herself with a grave mournful dignity very unlike the chattering excitement of all the other girls and women of whom the house was full. She was being dressed by the midwife, in Egypt a personage whose position and duties are far more varied and important than the English name signifies; and I went back to await her in the outer room among the matrons. In a few minutes she came in, robed in flowing white silk, and a long veil of clear white tulle. It has become the custom among the Copts of late years to wear a tulle or net veil in place of the old-fashioned veil of thick white muslin which no one could see through.

We waited a weary while, for the bride must not leave her house until the groomsmen come

to fetch her. At length the clamour of the brass band, and the shrill cries of the women, announced their arrival. In came Selib, the eldest brother of the bridegroom, and another man, each bearing a decorated wax candle nearly as big as himself, and advanced with smiles to the bride. But alas for poor Miriam! There was an instant's shocked pause, and then an indignant exchange of reproaches between Selib and the midwife. He had never seen—in his “far country”—a wedding veil of the new fashion, and it appeared to him most improper. Was the face of his brother's bride to be stared at by all the strangers in the street as she passed to the church?

The midwife angrily defended the veil as the newest and most correct thing. That might be—for this country, retorted Selib, but when she went to her husband's village every one would speak against her, and she would be remembered as the woman who permitted her face to be seen in the street on her wedding-day. The women disclaimed all responsibility for what his village (contemptuous accent) might do or say. If he wanted a wife from this country, he must take her according to the customs of this country. On the whole Selib concluded to do

so, and presented his arm to Miriam, who had remained speechless and passive during this little quarrel. They got her as far as the door of the outer room, and then there was another pause. It is the custom for the principal servant of the house (in this case represented by the church servant) to shut the door against them, and declare that they shall not carry the daughter of the house away. Argument failing, he was appeased by money (is not this characteristic), and the whole procession tumbled over each other down the stairs. Miriam's brother pushed and shouted till he had brought me from the rear to the place of honour just behind the bridesmaids. She had six little girls, one in green cotton, two in blue, and three in pink. Finally the procession got formed as follows: the brass band, making a hideous noise; next, a company of priests (generally it would be only one or two, but at least fourteen of the father's clerical friends had assembled to do him honour). They were all in their ordinary black robes except one, who wore a long vestment of crimson velvet (the epitrachelion) edged with gold, and embroidered with seven gold crosses. He also carried a cross, and had a large gold one hung round his neck. After them came two young

groomsmen, each carrying a bouquet of flowers. Just behind them, one of the blue bridesmaids walked alone, triumphantly holding aloft the flowers which I had brought. Next, the green bridesmaid walked backwards the whole way, fanning Miriam with a large fan of white feathers. Then poor Miriam, held up on each side by Selib and the other man. The other four bridesmaids carried her train—a most necessary item of ceremonial on this occasion! Then came Abd el Melek and I, and after us a confused herd of women uttering the shrill piercing cries which seem to denote indifferently grief or joy.

At the great door which leads down into the vestibule, we had another pause for that terrible heathen ceremony which both Christians and Mohammedans have perpetuated from the days of the Pharaohs. A young bullock was held in readiness by the executioner, and poor Miriam had to stand and see its throat cut before her, so that the blood gushed over the threshold and down the steps.¹ Then the carcass was dragged away, and Miriam had to step over the running blood,—indeed, we all did,—and went through the vestibule into the church.

The bridegroom was there already, as it is the

¹ The flesh of the animal sacrificed is given to the poor.

custom for him to have a sort of preparatory service to himself, before the women come in. He was clothed in the orthodox wedding garment, which is the property of the church, and exactly like a large full cope. In this case it was a brocade of gold thread on broad stripes of deep, bright colours. He sat in one of the two chairs of state, which were placed close together in front of the congregation, with a small clear space between them and the temporary altar. On this was placed the gospel stand, or wooden frame, in the centre of which the great sealed copy of the Gospels used for ceremonial purposes stands upright; and on which are fixed around it, also in an upright position, the silver fans and crosses belonging to the church, all stuck with lighted tapers. There were also two old branched candlesticks full of the same lighted tapers, and on the right and left hand of all these were modern china jars in which the two groomsmen deposited the bouquets they had carried in the procession. The little blue bridesmaid also laid upon the table the roses and lilies which I had bought, and then retired to her fellows behind the bride. But the little green bridesmaid stood solemnly in front of the bride and bridegroom the whole time, with her

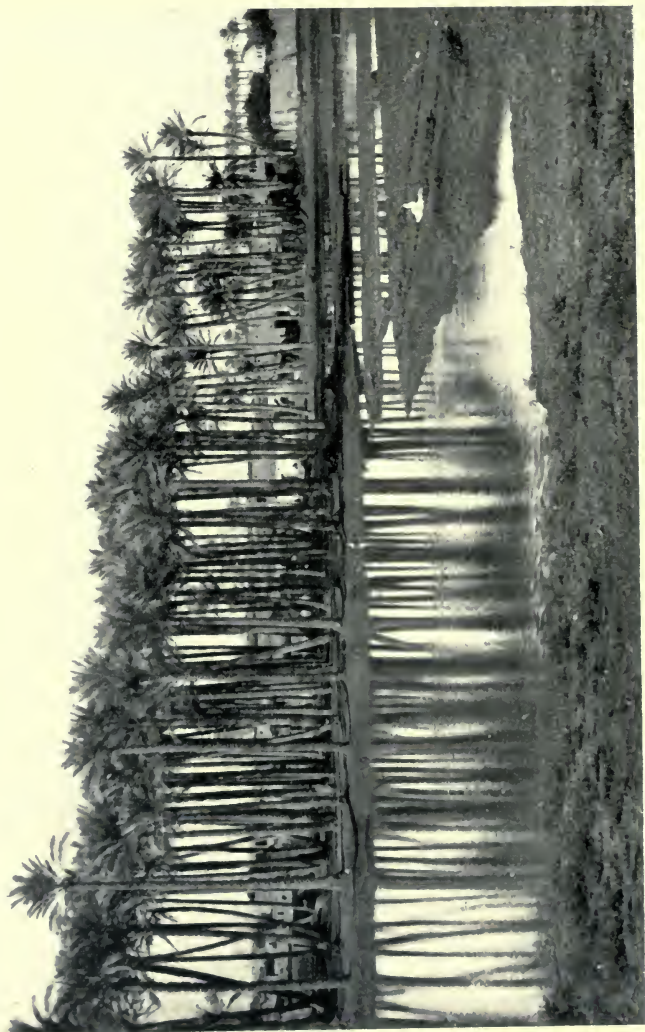
back to the altar, fanning them slowly and steadily with the feather fan. On either side the archway behind the temporary altar stood the choir boys, the elder ones in red garments, the younger ones in white, all with the crossed stoles peculiar to an Egyptian choir boy. All the time the church was filling the boys chanted a hymn, and during the whole service whenever they were singing, the congregation chattered without reserve, but whenever a priest stood up to read or pray there was a general hush, and they became quiet and attentive. The priests sat seven on each side of the altar, in a half-circle which completed the enclosure of the open space. Most of them took some part in the service, which consisted of lessons from the Scriptures describing the duties of husband and wife to each other ; prayer, praise, and blessing. The actual crowning and joining of hands under the wedding canopy—a long strip of embroidered white placed over the heads of both together, so that an embroidered cross rested on each head—was done by a very old priest from the native village of the bridegroom. He was almost blind, and a young priest stood on either side to guide his hands if necessary. He did put the bridegroom's crown on backwards, and it had to be

quietly reversed by the priest on his right. All the priests read well and clearly, even the old man managed to make himself heard. The bride's father took no part in the ceremony. When the long service was over, the priest in the crimson velvet vestment mounted the steps behind the altar for the wedding address. The whole scene was most striking, as this splendid figure stood above the flashing lights of the silver-laden altar, with the dark background behind of the dimly lighted chancel, and a group of choir boys on either hand. When he sat down, a young theological student in ordinary dress stood up to speak. But he began, as the priest had done, with the invocation "In the Name of God," etc., and there was an instant murmur from the priestly circle, put into words of public rebuke by one of them. "You must not begin in that way ; it is only permitted to the priests to speak in the Name of God." The youth looked abashed, but made his short speech ; and we thought all was over. But we were to have another modern innovation besides the transparent veil. There was a stir among the women at the back, and a small boy, about six, in an English knickerbocker suit, was passed forward to the front. He went bashfully but

unhesitatingly up the steps, and faced the congregation with his little hands held straight at his sides. Here he repeated, in a clear, ringing voice, without a single mistake, an address to the bride and bridegroom, in the course of which he wished them many nice boys, and some nice girls. The whole congregation clapped him when he came down, and we all poured out of the church. I knew the wedding feast would last till midnight, and even then the bride's fatigues are not over. At an early hour next morning, she has to sit in state to receive the congratulations of her relations and friends, who each give her a piece of money, a sovereign or half-sovereign, or less, as they can afford. To each one she gives, in return, a tiny bottle of scent and a muslin handkerchief. We had already stayed later than we intended, so I just followed Miriam upstairs to drink her health (in raspberry syrup), and then bade her good-bye. We made our way along the decorated and crowded alley, escorted by all the principal men of the Deyr, and emerged into the solemn brilliance of an Egyptian afterglow. All the western sky was a blaze of dull crimson behind the palms, and one splendid star shone down upon us like a young moon as we drove away.



AN EGYPTIAN FAIR



A PALM GROVE.

CHAPTER X

AN EGYPTIAN FAIR

ALL through the length and breadth of Egypt a certain saint, whose name is barely known in England, is held in veneration as second only to the Virgin Mary herself. In every church you enter you find a picture of a young and, so far as the artist can represent her, beautiful woman, surrounded by forty smaller pictures, in the same frame, each of a woman in the habit of a nun. If the church is one of the two or three occasionally visited by English and American tourists, you will probably be told that it represents St. Catherine. If you say in the language of the people, "Indeed, who told you it was St. Catherine?" the old priest will smile deprecatingly, and reply, "Well, of course, as your excellency knows, it is *really* Sitt Dimiana." But the tourists who are vaguely conscious that there is an Egyptian saint called St. Catherine, and have not heard of any other, tell him that

it is St. Catherine, and he is too polite to contradict them. Who St. Catherine may be he has no idea; probably it is the English way of pronouncing Dimiana. For St. Catherine of Alexandria is unknown in Egypt; if she ever existed, she has no honour in her own country. But there is hardly a Christian in the country who cannot tell you the story of Sitt Dimiana, and with wonderfully little variation in the different villages and towns.

"Sitt" does not mean "saint." The Egyptians, though they have a word for saint, borrowed from the Greek, never use it as a prefix. For saints of the sterner sex they use the Chaldean word Mar, which signifies Lord. Before a consonant, or if the personal pronoun is used, this becomes Mari, *i.e.* Mari Girghis, which we render in English St. George. In the same way Sitt, or almost invariably Sitte, sounding the final "e," which means "lady," or "my lady," is prefixed to the names of female saints.

I have written Dimiana as it is pronounced, the "i" short as in Jim, the "a" long as in Juliana; but I have little doubt that it is the feminine of Damian, as we generally write in the west the name of the Egyptian physician and saint who is so inseparably connected with his twin brother

Cosmas. What the Coptic root may be, I do not know, but I have been told by Egyptians that it is the same as that which forms the original of the word we now call Damietta.

The father of Dimiana, so runs the story, was the governor of one of the Egyptian provinces in the reign of Diocletian. He was a Christian, and so much respected both in his own province and at Court that Diocletian by no means desired to treat him with the rigour prescribed by the edict which ushered in the ten years' Reign of Terror, which is still remembered with horror by the Egyptians. So indelibly was the memory of this terrible time impressed on the national mind that the mark of it lies now, like a great dividing gulf, across their national life. They date their present era, as we all know, from the first year of the reign of Diocletian, and they call it, with sad significance, "the era of martyrs."

I have not been able to discover the name of Dimiana's father. It is lost in what the Egyptians consider his only title of honour—his fatherhood of the young and beautiful girl who from her earliest years he had dedicated to the service of God, and for whom he had founded a convent. Her maidens became her nuns, and

others joined her, till the number had reached to forty. It is said by some versions of the legend that she was only fifteen when she became abbess of the convent. She was already there when the edict of 303 was published, and not long after news was brought to her that the Emperor had offered her father to continue in his government and all his other honours, even to worship in his own house as it pleased him, so long as he allowed it to be publicly announced that he had submitted to the Imperial edict and embraced the religion of the State. A governor, in such a case, would be able to make the edict practically a dead letter in his province, and it was reported to Dimiana that her father intended to accept the offer of the Emperor. She sent, or went, it is not clear which, to entreat her father not so to imperil his immortal welfare, and by her tears and prayers she prevailed with him to refuse all compromise and to offer himself as a martyr for the faith. But an able and honest governor in a distant and important province of the empire was not so easily replaced, and Diocletian, instead of putting the father to death, turned all his fury on the daughter. A troop was dispatched at once to the convent, and not only Dimiana, but all her nuns with her, were

given the alternative of renouncing their faith, and submitting to the will of the Emperor, or suffering death by torture. The nuns responded to the call of their dauntless young abbess, and not one failed her. The whole forty endured tortures without flinching; they died together, and were buried in one grave.

That grave is still revered, not only by the faithful few—who from generation to generation have endured oppression, obloquy, and often savage persecution, sooner than forsake the faith of their fathers—but by all true Egyptians, whether Mohammedan or Christian. A convent has existed from time immemorial on the same site, and to this convent once a year a vast procession of pilgrims—men, women, and children—wend their way from all parts of Egypt. The sanctity of her shrine was so great that a vigil properly kept there would expel the most obstinate devil, and people afflicted with fits or epilepsy were brought from long distances to be cured. But the greatest miracle was one which was spoken of under the breath, as it were, and not to be mentioned at all except to the faithful—the Shadow of Sitt Dimiana—which yearly, at the same day and hour, appeared to her believing devotees.

I had heard for years of Sitt Dimiana, and one year I made up my mind that I would myself undertake the pilgrimage. A convent of nuns I knew would receive me with ready courtesy and hospitality, and I was quite prepared to rough it. It was too far to go there and back in the day from Cairo, even with the present extension of railways in the Delta. But I was kindly welcomed to Mansourah, the nearest largest town, and when I arrived there found that the French judge and his daughter, besides my hosts themselves and a young Egyptian lawyer, who had performed this pilgrimage more than once himself, would accompany us. Mr. Sideros (Isidorus) had already written to the bishop of the Province to inform him that our distinguished party intended to visit the fair, and had received for answer that the bishop himself would be unable to be present this year as business had called him to Palestine (a part of which is included in his diocese), but that his representative would be delighted to receive us, and that all the bishop's own rooms in the convent would be reserved for us.

One of the members of the judicial bench at Mansourah was going on leave, and the night of my arrival at Mansourah we went to a dinner given by

the French judge in his honour, at which I was most hospitably welcomed, and where the conversation—in a mixture of languages—turned chiefly on what we expected to see at the fair. I was anxious to obtain more information about the celebrated Shadow, but all I could learn was that for the last six years it had ceased to appear, and that the miraculous cures were therefore also in abeyance. We started at noon the next day, taking with us pillows, rugs, and saddles, in addition to our night gear, so that one compartment was filled with our luggage and servant, as well as another with our party of seven, for an American lady from the Mansourah mission had also joined us.

Wherever people travel the weather is “exceptional,” and our pilgrimage to Dimiana was no exception to the rule. The train had hardly moved away from Mansourah when it began to rain hard, although it was the middle of an Egyptian May and a chilly rain was flagrantly out of place.¹ We knew that we should have to spend an hour and a half or more at a little wayside station half-way between Mansourah and Bilkaas; and we had made quite a nice little plan for that halt. We would get out

¹ So I thought then. I have learned by experience that the May rain is a regular feature of the year.

and have a picnic tea in the shade of a palm grove, and then we would explore the village for Christian remains. We arrived at that station in such pelting rain that the surroundings were almost invisible, but we made out a cluster of desolate mud huts, which were apparently rapidly resolving themselves into the primitive element, some extremely white children, who were taking a shower bath in front of their homes, and that was all. No palm-groves, apparently no cultivation of any kind, though this could not have been the fact. A thin, shivering lad came along the train looking for me, and explained that Sheikh Mena (a Moham-medan Copt, who was constructing a new railway from Bilkaas, and whom I knew in Cairo) had sent him to wait upon the Sitt. He thankfully took refuge in the luggage carriage with our servant, and meanwhile, Miss L., the British judge's sister, managed, somehow, to produce hot coffee in a saucepan, which we much appreciated. A knot of labourers, who were waiting with some empty trucks, came up and interrogated our servants to know what these incomprehensible Frangis were doing here; but we won their fervent gratitude and approval by the distribution of

some cigarettes. Then we fell into conversation again about the vanished Shadow, and here I met with another instance of the difficulty one has in getting the Egyptians to talk frankly of their beliefs to us for fear of ridicule. They know we call ourselves Christians, but then, they argue, so do the Americans, who are manifestly unbelievers (in bishops, sacraments, and most things that the Egyptian mind regards as essential to the Christian religion), who knows if the English, who speak the same language, are any better? Mr. Sideros had often been asked about the Shadow before, and had affected to know and care nothing about it; but now that he heard us seriously discussing the nature of an apparition which we seemed prepared to accept in good faith, he dropped his mask of indifference and suddenly informed us that he had seen it himself some years before, and firmly believed in it. We eagerly asked him to tell us what he had seen.

We then learnt that the vision appeared in an ancient crypt or disused chapel, now nearly underground, and lighted only by one opening high up in the wall. At a certain hour on the day of the festival a bright light shone on the blank wall of this chapel, and the Shadow

passed across. But a Shadow of what? we asked.

"They say," answered Mr. Sideros, manifestly becoming uncomfortable again, "that it is the Shadow of Sitt Dimiana and the Archangel Michael."

"But why," I asked—"why the Archangel Michael?"

Here the British judge, who had been dozing, woke with a start, and looked across at me. His Christian name was Michael, but France hastened to explain to his colleague that it was the Archangel we had called upon. Meanwhile Mr. Sideros was explaining to me that *he* did not commit himself to the statement that it was Sitt Dimiana or the Archangel; all he would say was that he had certainly, at the appointed hour, seen the shadow of a woman pass across the brilliant light, followed by "men and women riding on asses," and the omen for the year was favourable or not according to the appearances. No one knew, he added, who, or how many, would appear, but always some shadows passed—who he would not himself pretend to say.

It seemed to me most probable, and the rest of the company agreed with me, that the

builders of the convent centuries ago must either by accident or design have built a sort of natural camera obscura, so contrived that when the sun was exactly in the right position a reflection was thrown upon the wall of the people passing outside. But then, we naturally asked ourselves, why should the apparition have ceased for the last six or seven years to appear. Further inquiry cleared up this difficulty at any rate. I had observed that when the English settled themselves in Egypt, and seemed likely to stay there some years, the Christian Egyptians had taken advantage of their immunity from oppression to rebuild their ancient, and, in many cases, almost ruinous churches in every direction. Much as the antiquarian must regret this, he would at least have acknowledged that it was in many cases necessary if the churches were to continue at all; and it is only fair to the Egyptians to say that, whatever Vandalisms they have been guilty of, they may favourably compare with ourselves when we began to restore our churches in the present century. Still we must all regret the disappearance of curious structural relics all over Egypt in the first ten years of the English occupation, and among them has been the build-

ing which caused the Shadow of Sitt Dimiana. The whole convent was renovated, white-washed, and in great part rebuilt. Even the shrine did not escape. They pulled down the outer covering, and began to prise up an enormous stone, which was said to mark the spot where the forty-one corpses had been buried together, when a jet of water, "white as milk," said one informant, sprung out with such force that the workmen were knocked down and blinded. (The one who held the lever at the moment is said to have remained blind some time—till the gracious lady had pity on him, and healed him.) This was taken as the clearest possible intimation that Sitt Dimiana was angry at the proposed disturbance of her grave, the great stone was hastily fixed in its place again, though with some difficulty, and an enormous circular tomb of white plaster built over it. It is with this abortive attempt to open Sitt Dimiana's tomb that the Egyptians connect the disappearance of their yearly apparition, as they fear Sitt Dimiana has not yet entirely forgiven their well-meant intrusion, though they hope that she will do so some day.

Fortunately for us, the rain had ceased when

we arrived at Bilkaas, where we were cordially welcomed by Sheikh Mena, in his flowing robes. We left him and Mr. Sideros to bargain with the villagers for donkeys and mules wherewith to transport ourselves and our baggage to the fair, and took refuge in the upper part of the little Greek hotel, which appeared to be entirely occupied by Sheikh Mena and his attendants, though, of course, not a soul was allowed to mount the outside staircase or remain in the vicinity of the English ladies as soon as they had ushered us upstairs. Bilkaas is a fairly picturesque village, with palms above the low mud houses, and a little river running by. Externally the church was more imposing than usual; instead of being concealed as much as possible by houses built against it, it stood out boldly by itself on a rising ground, with even a suggestion of cloisters round it. I wanted to go and see it, but the day was already far spent, and it seemed doubtful if we should reach the convent before nightfall; so we obediently mounted our ragged steeds, who had evidently been hard worked in the service of pilgrims, and filed out of Bilkaas through the mud alleys which serve for streets.

Our way for some time lay along the bank of the little river, and was not calculated to reassure nervous riders. The green bank went steeply down into the water on one side, and on the other several feet into the fields, and the path on the top of this ridge was of the narrowest. On an ordinary occasion this would not have mattered much, but the track was full of pilgrims going and returning, most of them on foot, but many of them on horses, mules, or asses. Sometimes, indeed, we met a whole drove of donkeys returning empty for fresh burdens, and these were the most troublesome of all. The only safety against being jostled unceremoniously into the river was to allow our boys to push the donkeys right and left by main force. None of them, I am thankful to say, went into the river on our account, but several were plumped down on the crops on the other side of the bank, and left to scramble up again as they could. Every one was very good-natured, however, and before very long we left the bank of the river and turned off across a barren and apparently boundless plain. It was not a sand desert, for the soil had once been very fertile, and would be again under favourable circumstances. But for some centuries now it has been little cared



AN EGYPTIAN VILLAGE.

for ; the dykes which, many miles to the north, kept the sea out, have given way, and the land has become strongly impregnated with salt. What with the rain and the hundreds of pilgrim feet that had trodden it all day, it was now in many places a morass, through which our beasts struggled pluckily, sinking deep at every step. For miles before we reached the convent we saw its high walls and white domes before us against the northern sky, while the fast-dying sunlight glorified the pools of water on the desolate plain. By and by we made out the peaked roofs of countless tents clustered round the convent, and at last, just after sunset, while the glow yet lingered in the sky, we rode up to the seething mass of humanity which seemed so strangely out of place in this otherwise lifeless district, and were warmly greeted by the bishop's representative and the occupants of the monastery.

This was my first surprise. I had always been told of St. Dimiana's nuns, and nothing had been said to me of monks. When and how the change had taken place, I do not know—probably centuries ago, but “min zimaam” (a *very* long time ago), my informants told me, there had been monks here and no nuns. I congratulated

myself that, through the kindness of the L.'s, I had not come alone.

The commissary — for I cannot otherwise reproduce his official title—was a courteous gentleman of middle age, in the black robes and turban of the Egyptian monk. He at once greeted me with a special welcome, informing those around him that this lady was a pilgrim indeed, since he had seen me above five years before visiting the holy places at Jerusalem. It was quite true that I had done so, but I had no recollection whatever of seeing my present host anywhere in the Holy City. We were given the three best rooms in the Deyr for ourselves—one as dining and sitting room, one for the men and one for the women to sleep in. They were rather distressed to find that we had brought our own provisions, assuring us that everything had been prepared for us. However, we made a hasty supper, and then wandered about in the Deyr by ourselves, as the priests had withdrawn to allow us to eat, and were now assisting at one of the constant services of the week in the principal church. It is quite impossible to give in words a clear description of the arrangement of the various churches and chapels and other places within the convent walls, so I shall not

attempt it. There was a good deal of still unfinished building, and bare walls where the finances had not yet allowed of decoration. Some of the old woodwork had been kept, but we did not find any particularly good specimens of ancient work, partly because the dense pilgrim crowd everywhere prevented any thorough researches. Every one greeted us with courtesy, and no one begged of us or annoyed us in any way, though we seven were by ourselves. We looked at the huge round tomb under which the forty martyrs are said to rest, and then wandered into the crypts near, as every one else seemed to be going that way. Presently we passed through a narrow archway, and found ourselves in the midst of a crowd of the poorest sort of pilgrims, packed so tight in a perfectly barren chamber, that we were at once surrounded and unable to move. We were carrying candles, but on our entrance there went up a general cry, "Put out the light! oh, put out the light! we must not have the light!"

Fortunately, we all understood Arabic, and were all anxious to hurt no one's feelings. By a common impulse we extinguished our candles, and were all at once enveloped in a darkness and silence so profound that it seemed as sensibly felt

as the contact of the dense mass around us. I acknowledge that I slipped my hand into that of the French judge, who happened to be next me, determined to keep hold of some one I knew, at any rate. There was a moment's dead pause, and then through the darkness rose one of the most pathetic wails I ever heard. It was an earnest appeal to Sitt Dimiana to forgive them, to be gracious unto them, and to appear to them once more. No priest took any part in it or countenanced it, but we found that the poorer and more superstitious of the pilgrims held this meeting every year since the Shadow ceased to appear. One man only chanted the prayer, but deep murmurs of assent broke again and again from the mournful crowd. After some moments a slight movement among them allowed us to escape, and we went back towards the living rooms of the Deyr, where we found the commissary, the monk in charge always of the convent, and the priest of Mansourah. This trio evidently considered us in a special sense their guests, and were waiting to go outside with us. Miss L. and the daughter of France were too tired but the rest of us could not lose the chance.

We had already been looking down on the lighted fair from our windows, and had seen one

thing which puzzled us very much. It looked exactly like a Mohammedan Zikr, and I appealed to our hosts to know what it meant, but they were evidently disturbed at the question, and turned it off, saying, that they were foolish people; it was not good; it was nothing at all. We pressed them no further, but afterwards we went to see for ourselves, and then did not wonder that the good priests disapproved of it. It was a caricature by the Egyptian Christians of a Mohammedan Zikr—a most dangerous pleasantry on their part, and, I imagine, only indulged in because they believe that just then, while the English were new in the country, the Mohammedans would not dare to attack them. The leader of the Zikr wore a false nose and beard, with sundry grotesque additions to his dress, which, doubtless, had some special signification, and the imitation went on with bursts of derisive merriment, and, I think, abuse of their Mohammedan masters.¹

¹ A Zikr is not an essential feature of the Mohammedan religion; by the better sort, I believe, such practices are condemned. It is generally performed by members of the different guilds, who call themselves Dervishes, but in ordinary life are peacefully inclined barbers, donkey-boys, etc. etc. One of the best known examples is that which tourists used to go to see every week in Old Cairo, under the names of "the howling Dervishes."

In deference to the evident uneasiness of our hosts we turned aside from this unedifying spectacle, and went by the flickering light of a candle to see the sacred well—which has acquired sanctity from the fact that it is the only well of sweet water for miles round in this barren and brackish region, and that it has never been known to fail. Then we wandered in and out of the lighted camp, where diversions of all kinds were being carried on. Every one seemed orderly and happy, there may have been plenty of bad language, since that, I fear, is inseparable from low-class native talk ; but we heard none, not even the familiar oaths of the Cairo streets ; nor did we see any one the worse for liquor, and only about three beggars, I think, the whole time. Our own idea would have been to linger among the different groups where amusements were going on, but after passing through the principal street of tents our companions made it evident that we were expected to leave the gay scene behind us, and walk across a dark expanse of desert to a cluster of faintly twinkling lights. The commissary had returned to the convent, but we had still the two other priests with us, also the son of the priest of Mansourah and a young Europeanised Copt, who was very officious,

and whom none of us liked very much. We afterwards found that he hoped to interest one of us to procure a Government appointment for him.

We walked across the plain, and presently the lights resolved themselves into a group of three tents—the camp of the priest of Mansourah, who had sent word that he hoped we would honour him with a visit. We were received by two nice-looking girls, one of whom spoke French, and both dressed in a mixture of European and native garments with several articles of jewellery, evidently arrayed in all their best to do us honour. We did not gather—one must not ask direct questions on such subjects—whether the priest's wife had been left behind in Mansourah, or whether she was dead. One of the girls was his daughter, the other a relation, who had come to the fair with them. Both were apparently unmarried and very shy, answering only when directly addressed, and sitting with downcast eyes in the presence of men, though, of course, they wore no veils.

We went through the stages of sherbet, cigarettes, and coffee, and exchange of courtesies, most of which was done by the American lady, who was by far the best Arabic scholar among

us. Then we went back to the camp, still accompanied by the priests ; but though anxious not to scandalise them, and a little uncertain how far they approved of such things, we could not resist entering a large theatre tent where a Coptic company were performing a play which seemed to me to be taken from the *Arabian Nights*. The priests entered gravely behind us, and no sooner were we observed as their guests than way was made for us to pass in as far as the dense crowd would allow, and the men nearest insisted on giving up their seats to us, but all was done very quietly, and the moment we were comfortably settled every one became absorbed in the play again. The fisherman acted with extreme vigour, the other characters, who were chiefly of high rank, maintained the impassive countenances and dignified movements which Oriental fine manners require. But it was getting late, and we did not wish to oversleep ourselves on the morrow, so we withdrew after a time and sought repose on the divans. Here Mr. Sideros played us just the kind of trick which I might have expected, but which took us all in. We were very anxious not to miss the solemn celebration of the baptismal service with which the last and greatest day of

the feast begins. It is a custom, evidently dating from the times of persecution, to collect all the babies born in the district since the preceding year and bring them to be baptized on this day, when travelling can be done in large numbers and friends easily gathered together. The babies are kept in the background till the ceremony is over, and it is performed early in the morning ; doubtless, if there were any reason to fear a Mohammedan attack, it would be gone through, as so many of their great ceremonies are, just after midnight. As it is, the babes and their mothers are brought in to spend the night in the church, as the place of greatest safety. But the most touching feature is that when the baptism is an accomplished fact, the greatest publicity is given to it, as there is nothing a good Copt dreads so much as any appearance of being ashamed of his religion. In this case, after the church services are over, the godfathers of the children are mounted on horseback, and are led in solemn procession about the camp, bearing their newly christened infants in their arms, that all the faithful may know that these children have been duly received into the Church.

We particularly wanted to see the baptisms,

and asked Mr. Sideros at what hour the service began. He did not believe we really wished to get up so early, but thought we said so out of politeness; and told us the hour at which he thought we should like to appear, namely, nine o'clock. We believed him, with the result that when at nine o'clock we joined the congregation in the chapel, we found that Mr. Sideros himself had been up since six, attending to his religious duties; and the baptisms were all over. The babies still lay about on their mothers' laps, and the church was still crammed, for the second part of the service was about to begin—the solemn first communion of the older children who had been brought up by their parents for that purpose. The crowd was so great about the doors of the sanctuary that though every one made way for us we could not have seen much; and the commissary was evidently very anxious that these representatives of the strong Christian power, whose sympathy the Copts are so much concerned to gain, should carry away a just impression of their services.¹ There was a brief whispered consultation, and then our party was

¹ As a matter of fact, besides Mr. Sideros, who was a pure Egyptian of the old stock, our party consisted of one American, two Anglo-Irish, two of mixed Belgian and English blood, and one purely English; but we all passed as English together.

invited to pass the gates of the sanctuary, and chairs were placed for us at one side, so that we could see what was going on without making part of the group around the altar.

The priests—only one of whom actually officiated and was in full vestments—stood in a semicircle round the west, north, and south, and the children, boys and girls alike, stood in a semicircle meeting them on the north, east, and south sides, all facing the altar. Sundry male guardians and friends of the children stood behind them, along the eastern wall of the sanctuary. The Egyptian altar always stands clear in the middle of the sanctuary, and in the earlier churches the seats for the elders and priests are built against the wall of the apse behind the altar. In a cathedral church the central seat of these stone benches is the bishop's throne, and elevated above the rest.

The children all carried tapers in their hands, and the little girls all wore white veils—simple ones of native cotton hanging down behind, but not over the face; such as they wear every day, though the everyday veils are generally of coloured cotton. The service was mostly in Coptic, so we understood very little, but some of our party had never seen the Egyptian rite before.

It is only in the Egyptian Church, I think, that they retain the most primitive form of administering the sacrament—a sop dipped in wine. The service is very long, and the incense-laden atmosphere became too much for our American friend, so she retreated in a somewhat ignominious fashion through a side window, but the rest of us waited till the children, each with his clean napkin (provided by the church) held carefully under his or her chin, had received the sop, and the procession began to form. Then we slipped out in the rear, but stood on one side to see it pass us again before leaving the church, the priests and choir boys chanting, the banners borne before the children, and all carrying lighted tapers. It was a matter of some difficulty for the procession to make its way round the crowded church, though the people squeezed together and tried to leave a clear lane for them as they came. Once one of the girl's veils caught fire, but a bystander started forward, and instantly crushed out the flame with his hands. After that, he took away the tapers of the smaller children and extinguished them.

The atmosphere was rather suffocating on a hot day, and we had seen enough, so we quietly withdrew from the church, and went out again

into the camp. We bought some beads and bangles in the bazaar; almost everything we saw was imported, though some kinds of the glass bangles and other things cannot be bought in Europe, as they are made only for exportation. Little crosses and rosaries, and gay cotton handkerchiefs, with materials for sewing, filled most of the picturesque stalls. One of our party bought an article of native manufacture, very difficult to get, and worth several dollars—a cup carved of rhinoceros horn in one piece, and almost transparent. The great merit of them in Egyptian eyes is that they are supposed to show by change of colour if any poison is introduced into the cup. But the natives do not come to Sitt Dimiana's fair to sell, though they eagerly buy the foreign wares brought there for the occasion by enterprising traders.

The Sheikh of Bilkaas, like most of the other great men in the camp, was holding a final reception, and we were invited to enter. It was like all other Egyptian receptions, two lanes of men sitting along each side of the tent in their picturesque robes, some on chairs, some—towards the entrance, or less honourable part of the tent—on the ground, while servants carried round the sherbet with its embroidered towel, the

cigarettes, and finally the coffee. The Egyptians have learned now that English ladies do not smoke,—indeed, only the married women among themselves do so,—and they think it no impoliteness when we refuse; but one of the judges did not smoke, and this was a thing they did find difficult to understand. Careful explanations had to be made in every case, lest offence should be taken at so strange a refusal of hospitality.

It was while we were in the Sheikh's tent that the baptismal procession came by, and it was the most picturesque and interesting sight of the fair. We saw it well, for they paused opposite the Sheikh's tent for some moments; he being one of the notables who was particularly desired to take cognisance of the fact that the baptisms had been duly performed.

First came a water-carrier, offering to every one the water of the sacred well, "without money and without price." Then the trumpeters, blowing on the silver trumpets of the church. Behind, the great banner, followed by two smaller ones, all beautifully embroidered and surmounted by old silver crosses of considerable size. Then some priests and other officers of the church walking, and

then two and two, mounted on horseback, the godfathers of the newly baptized infants, holding them in their arms for all the world to see. The godfathers were clad in silken copes and garments from the treasury of the church for the occasion, and presented a really imposing sight. We saw them several times again later, as they made their slow way in and out among the tents. On the outskirts of the camp a game was going on, which gave occasion for a pretty display of Egyptian horsemanship; but I had seen such games before, and was anxious to get a rough sketch of the convent, so leaving the rest to watch the players I made my way back to the Deyr, got my sketching things, and went out to the south-east of the convent, the camp lying on the east, north, and west sides only. I had to shelter myself as best I could under my sunshade from the midday sun, for the desert was absolutely flat and treeless for miles. A good many of the pilgrims were curious to know what I was doing, but as I had so pointedly withdrawn myself from the camp, their good manners would not permit them to follow me. Only two little boys, whose father probably was not there to restrain them (no self-respecting Egyptian boy, I fear, would pay

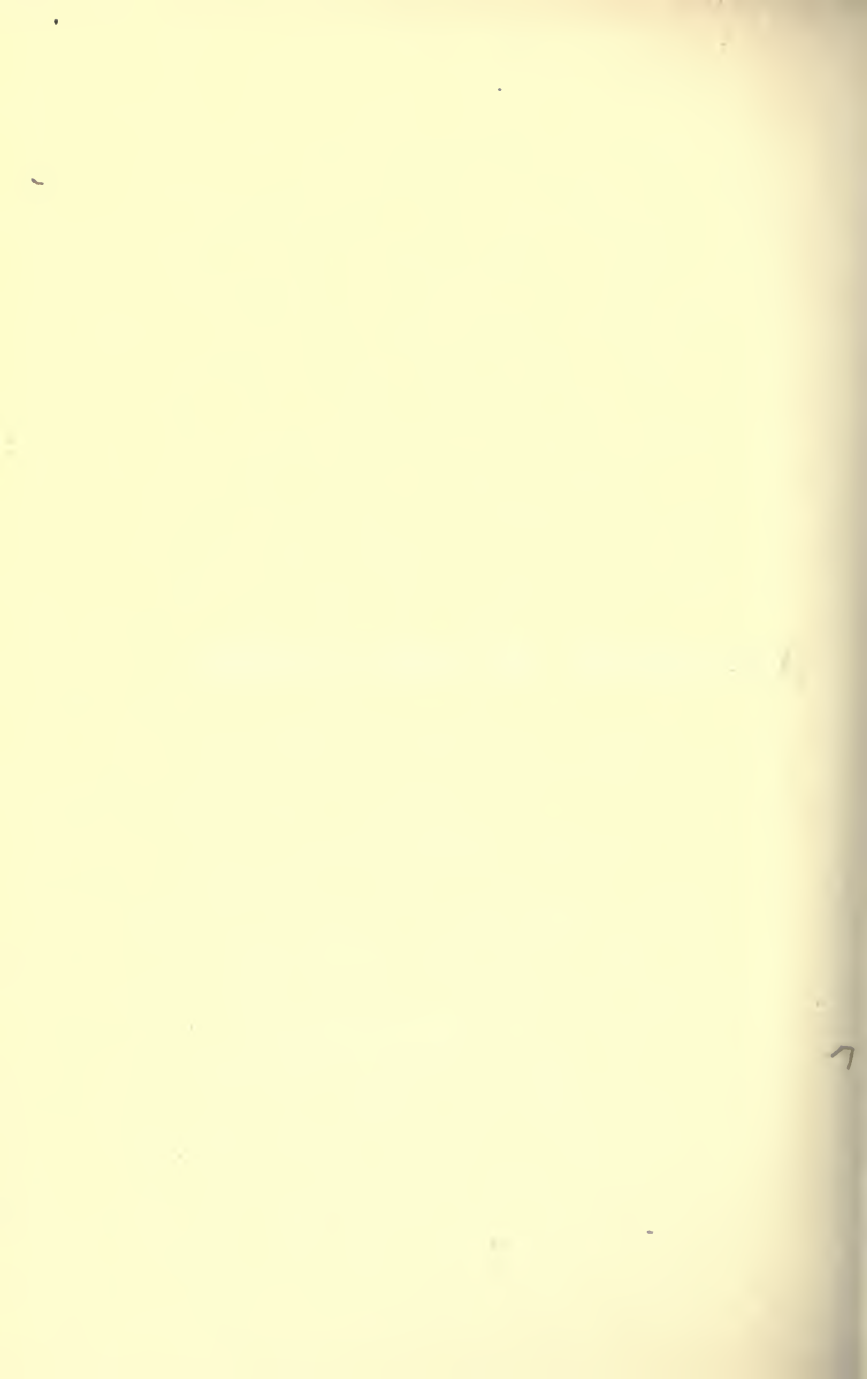
the smallest attention to a mother's command), crept shyly and silently across the intervening space, and took up a position behind me, commenting in subdued whispers on my proceedings.

I could not stay very long in the fierce sun ; besides, it was growing near the time for our departure. We had a hasty lunch, and then some of us asked leave of our host to ascend to the roof of the convent and see the view. No doubt he thought it an odd fancy in the burning heat of the day—the proper time to walk upon the roof is sunset—but he most courteously mounted up every step of the way with us, and seemed pleased at our appreciation of the view, though, indeed, there was nothing to be seen but the busy chattering many-coloured pilgrim camp below us and the far-reaching desert on every hand.

But the animals were waiting, and if we did not catch the one evening train from Bilkaas we must spend the night there, so we descended to the doorway and took leave of our kind entertainers with genuine regret. Once more we crossed the barren plain in company with a long train of departing pilgrims ; once more we exchanged courtesies with Sheikh Mena at

Bilkaas. By ten o'clock that night we had reached the friendly English household at Mansourah, and it seemed already days instead of hours since we left the Shrine of Sitt Dimiana.

A PARSON OF ALL WORK







THE DEAN.

CHAPTER XI

A PARSON OF ALL WORK

MY *History of the Egyptian Church* was finished just about the time of my marriage to the Dean, else, as I afterwards told him, it would certainly never have been finished at all. I had seen perhaps more of his work than any one else, but I soon found that the manifold activities of Church House were much beyond what I had realised, and would absorb my whole time and energies. I left all writing, and my work parties for the Egyptian girls and sundry other matters came one after another to an end. The Dean used to be downstairs at six o'clock, and till I insisted on a change being made he took no breakfast at all, except a cup of tea. He would be absorbed in his writing or study till eight, and then if there was not a service, or later if there were, the stream of people who wanted to see him about something, would begin, and go on sometimes till luncheon time, or till he had

to go off to see some sick person. Besides our own people a great deal of his time was taken up with international tramps; people who wander about the world very much as our own tramps and loafers wander about England. Many of them are well-dressed, most of them have a sad story ready, none of them have ever really settled to work, and very few have any intention of doing so. They were generally of uncertain nationality; if they could not make even the remotest claim to British interest and sympathy, they were careful to belong to some small state or province which had no consulate in Cairo to whom they could be referred.

Aman—I think he was an Armenian naturalised British subject, who claimed to have married an Abyssinian princess—brought his four parti-coloured infants to sit upon our doorstep till homes could be found for them; their mother being dead. A Jewess who claimed to belong to, and therefore to be supported by, the English Church came to Cairo to look for her husband who had deserted her, bringing four small children, only one of whom could speak any European tongue; and then suddenly went totally blind. One woman was actually sent

out by some Board of Guardians in England with four penniless little girls under twelve.

But so many such families rise up in my memory as I write that I cannot go on with the list. The thing that struck me as odd was that the number of children generally seemed to be four. It seemed as if almost every year we had to take charge of a family, and sometimes we had hardly settled one set in private homes (there were no public ones) or sent them away from the country before the next came. These, of course, were cases where charity was really needed, but the international tramps for the most part were just loafers and, generally, single men. They would "look for work" in one town till they had got as much money as people would give them, and then they would come and apply for help to get to the next town where they had "heard of work," which they were sure to get if only they could get the necessary railway pass. I do not remember more than one woman tramp of this kind, and she was an American girl, young and pretty, whose particular line appeared to be dancing and singing if she could get it, and who was slowly tramping—or dancing—round the world. She came to me for work, but I could only offer her the humdrum employment

of sewing (since she was clearly not qualified to teach anything except dancing), and that was not to her taste. I saw her about for a week or two, and then she drifted away ; but she did not come for money for her ticket. Besides the personal help which the Dean gave from his own pocket, he had the administration of a small fund, left to the poor of the English church in Cairo by a Syrian Christian in token of gratitude for benefits received from the English. As he never gave any one money without careful inquiry, and when he took up a case saw it through till help was no longer required, this relief took up much time.

Not only beggars and tramps and deserving cases of distress came to Church House, but all sorts of unexpected visitors. One morning we found an extremely respectable old gentleman in Oriental dress sitting placidly on our doorstep. He turned out to be a Christian priest from some place unknown to us in the interior of Asia, and by his side stood his servant or disciple carrying the rolled-up bed, which contained his travelling outfit. He had to come to Cairo for some reason from his remote province, and on stepping out of the train at Cairo station asked for the Head of the Christian Church. The Moslem Egyptians,

to whom he had appealed, brought him straight to my husband and left him at the gate. We understood, of course, that he came to claim the three days' hospitality which all over the East any travelling Christian is entitled to claim from another in a place where he has no friends. But under the circumstances, among them the fact that we had not a language in common, not even Hebrew or Arabic, we felt that we must fulfil our obligations by proxy. We desired our head man to conduct him to an international establishment and to arrange for his reception there at our expense for three days. Mohammed the Great, in some way, managed to make him understand, and they went off together, followed by the disciple carrying the bed. He stayed his three days in the rooms provided for him and then disappeared. We never knew his name, or why he came, or where he went. In the case of young Englishmen, of course, it was only natural that, as they sometimes did, they should come straight from the station to Church House on arrival and ask to be shown to a respectable lodging.

One day Mohammed came in to say that there was a native servant outside who wanted to know where he should find his master. I, not

unnaturally, asked who his master was, and was gravely informed that he had forgotten his master's name, but had come to us because he was an Englishman. I went out to the front gate to investigate. There was an old native, with a *carro* (native cart) quite full of obviously English luggage, and leading a dog by a string. On being questioned, he said that his master was an Englishman stationed in one of the provincial towns—I have forgotten which—that yesterday this Englishman had received a telegram, and had at once risen and gone to Cairo by train. Then he, the servant, had received a telegram bidding him pack up everything and bring it to Cairo. So he had collected his master's effects and come to Cairo, but the people at the railway station (implied contempt for their intelligence) could not tell him where his master was, and had told him to go and ask the Priest of the English. And would my excellency be good enough to tell him.

I again asked his master's name and was told that he could not remember it. I asked if he knew the department to which he belonged. Yes (promptly), it was the Irrigation. I went in and got the directory, from which I slowly

read to the man all the names of Englishmen in the Irrigation. He shook his head sadly, he could not recognise one. That did not surprise me, for nicknames are as common in Egypt now as they were a thousand years ago, and very few Englishmen are known to the natives by their proper names. I then went and examined the solid leather portmanteaux. Not a label of any kind, not even an initial. A bright idea struck me, and I called the dog to examine his collar, but that too was blank. But I had some reason to suppose that some of the Irrigation officers would be meeting at a certain house in Cairo that afternoon, so finally I sent a man to guide the old native to that house, and told him to sit upon the doorstep till his master appeared. He went off obediently, and I suppose my conjecture was right, for he did not return, nor did I ever discover who his master was.

A good many years ago, when we heard of a new English family who had come out to some of the various works in Boulak, we were able to trace them with comparative ease. I used generally to drive down to a certain district where four roads met, and then stop the carriage and ask the first respectable-looking

native who passed if he could tell me in which house the new Englishman was living. But soon they came so thick and fast that this primitive method had to be given up. On one occasion I had driven down to the usual place and asked the usual question of an old man who passed the carriage. He lifted up his eyes and glared solemnly at me for a moment. Then with a dramatic sweep of his right arm to each quarter of the compass in turn, and with a rising inflection—

“There are English in that house. There are English in that house. There are English in that house. There are English in that house. The whole world is full of English!” and so went his way.

Some of the people who came and wrote to us were hardly sane. One man, a Chaldean, who spoke seventeen languages, solemnly assured us that he had seen the remains of Noah’s ark upon Mount Ararat and *had photographed them*. The photograph had unfortunately been mislaid. This gentleman put us to a good deal of trouble and expense before he was moved on. He described himself on his card in several varieties of large type and with a coronet at the top as follows:—

His Majestic Holiness, The Sovereign Pontiff

MARAN MAR JOHN JOSEPH

The Zamourin Nouri

Chaldean Universal Patriarch

Of the Orthodox Apostolic British Empire
of Great India

with various directions added to find his Patriarchal Court in India.

It took us sometimes three afternoons of search, in the most insanitary streets, to find new English comers whose ignorance of Cairo had led them to take rooms in undesirable quarters of the town. On one occasion we heard that the doctor had been fetched by the English family for which we were looking, so my husband wrote to him to know where we should find them. This was his reply :

MY DEAR DEAN,—The M.'s live in a house without a number, in a street without a name, next door to an Armenian butcher who, I think, has no sign, west of Abdbin Palace! The staircase has eighty-seven steps. . . .

Sometimes the doctor had to be called in to decide whether manifestly incapable people on our doorstep were drunk or ill. I have

had to call native servants to take up a drunken Irishwoman, speechless and unconscious, and carry her off to deposit her like a log on a hospital bed to be dealt with by the nurses. But I think this was the only case of a woman drunkard we had to deal with, though I heard tales of another Irishwoman who indulged in throwing vitriol when she was in that condition, but that was before I married the Dean. Male drunkards were unfortunately common.

I have taken men out of prison more than once in Egypt without much formality or any authority but my own order; but I only once sent an Englishman to prison—or, to be accurate, an Irishman, and that was not nearly such a simple affair. He came into the house at half-past one at night and demanded to see the Dean. There was always a servant on duty—this night there happened to be two on the premises—and they had instructions that no English person was ever to be refused admittance to the Dean by night or day. But having let the man into the house, the servant became suspicious, and there was some parley which woke me up. I got into a dressing-gown and went downstairs. The Dean had fallen asleep after an exhausting day and I

did not want him disturbed without good reason, so I asked the man to tell me what he wanted. He said it was a private matter, and no one but the Dean would do. I asked if any one was ill? did a baby want christening? and becoming more suspicious as the man returned evasive answers, I flatly refused to have the Dean called up unless the man gave me some reason that would not wait till the morning. Then he blurted out that he wanted the price of a night's lodging. By this time I was sure that he had been drinking, and was not going to supply him with money. I wrote an order for a night's lodging on the International Home, and told him to come round and see the Dean in the morning. He took the paper mechanically and began to argue, but the servants now interfered and quietly but firmly elbowed him out and shut the door. I went back to bed, but about half-past three the door bell rang violently again. I went down to find the man in the house again, and the servants, sulky and disgusted at having admitted him before they were awake enough to recognise him, were trying to make him go away without calling me. He began a long and noisy appeal to me—my servants had treated him abominably,

he was not accustomed to this sort of thing, he was a man who took his twenty pounds a month, etc. I lost patience at last and told him flatly he was drunk. He was silent for a moment, and then said with much dignity and portentous gravity, "I am very sorry to hear you make such a suggestion, very sorry indeed." "I'm sorry to have to make it," I said, "but it's true, and I can't have you making a disturbance here any longer. If you do not leave the house in five minutes, I will send for a policeman, and you shall go to prison."

He did not believe me in the least and poured out a steady stream of abuse and protest, with the servants standing silent and watchful on either side of him. At the end of five minutes I commanded one of them to go for a policeman. He went, and in a few moments two of the largest Egyptian policemen I ever saw silently ranged themselves in front of me and saluted. I told them to take the man away and lock him up for the night. They saluted again, and looked unhappily at the Irishman, who did not in the least believe they would venture to touch him. Finally they pleaded with much submission that this was a terrible command, and that they might

get into trouble if they laid hands on an Inglesi. If the Dean himself were to give the order—but short of that they could not venture!

Something had to be done to end the situation, so I had to go and wake up the Dean after all and bring him down. But the Dean was so angry at the man's behaviour to me that after a very few questions and answers he wrote an order on his card for the man to go to prison. Then the two policemen saluted and laid hands on the Irishman with the utmost cheerfulness and hauled him off. The Irishman was so taken by surprise that he was out of the house before he realised what had happened. But he howled with fury, as if he were being murdered, all down the street, till we wondered that a crowd did not collect. And the next morning an officer and ten men all in full uniform brought the Irishman in custody to ask what it was our further pleasure to do with him. But by that time, of course, he was sober enough to reason with, so we told them they might let him go, and they saluted and retired with great promptitude.

We used to have a good many people drop in for breakfast after the service on Fridays and Sundays, and occasionally if we had noticed a strange figure very regular in attendance we

would conclude that he was a new resident and ask him to come in by way of making acquaintance with him. In this way we got to know stray young men who when they first arrived had not many friends and were glad to come to Church House. But I once nearly made a ridiculous mistake. We had noticed for several Sundays a newcomer who never missed in his attendance, but who was always alone and never seen to speak to any one. We tried several times to find out if any one of our more constant visitors knew his name, but no one could tell us who he was or anything about him. At length I made up my mind that I would put it off no longer, but on the very next Sunday would speak to him myself and ask if he cared to come in to breakfast. So far I had seen him nowhere except in church, but in the course of this week it happened that he passed as I talked with one of my friends, and I again pointed him out with my usual query.

“That man?” said my friend. “Why, that’s Lord Edward Cecil.”

I concluded that Lord Edward Cecil stood in no need of my kindly attentions, and did not ask him to join our Sunday breakfast party. We made acquaintance with him in the ordinary

way afterwards, but I never told him how much solicitude we had wasted upon him.

The Berberi servants, like many good English ones, have a watchful care of their master's social dignity, and each household of any importance in Egypt knows and jealously exacts any privileges that belong to it. By law, of course, such privileges are conferred according to the "Capitulations," which know no such person as the Priest of the English ; but among the natives he was given very high rank, though it was some time before he found it out. One rule among them is that the carriage containing a man of rank must not be passed by any one who is not of equal or higher rank. The Dean had not till the last two years of his life a carriage of his own, but every carriage driver who was called by the Dean—Mohammed the Great took care that he had good horses—made a point of passing every one else. He rather liked driving fast, but never discovered the signification of this till I told him, much to his amusement. One day we were spinning along as usual and passing every carriage on the road, when suddenly our driver slackened speed and fell into the ordinary jog-trot. Looking up I perceived a short colloquy in lowered tones going on, and then Mohammed

the Great turned round on his perch and solemnly referred the problem to me. It was Lord Cromer's carriage in front. Might they pass him too? With becoming gravity and firmness I rebuked the revolutionary proposal. No, the Dean would not pass Lord Cromer. So we proceeded solemnly behind his portly horses for a little while, and then he turned off to the right. With visible relief our driver gave the word to his horses and we resumed our reckless career.

Sometimes the Egyptian respect for the Dean was of real service to us. Once I remember we were driving fast through the native town and suddenly found ourselves swallowed up in a vast religious procession (the Mahmal). There was no other carriage within sight and ours seemed lost in the dense native crowd. Mohammed the Great was not with us, and we told the indignant driver to be silent and move at a walk. But even that was impossible in a few moments. The people swarmed over the carriage steps and horses, at first taking no more notice of us than if we had been lay figures, but in spite of ourselves we were an obstruction. In a short time there was an ominous murmur in the crowd, then a cry of "Christians! Christians!" and some took up stones to throw. Just as I was meditating

an address in my best Arabic (the Dean did not speak Arabic), a man, who had climbed up a little way, caught sight of the Dean in the carriage and recognised him. Instantly he cuffed the nearest lad who was shouting "Christians!" and called aloud to the crowd, "What are you doing? Don't you see it is the Great Priest of the English?" He added more words which I could not catch, but their effect was immediate. The crowd did its best to fall back, and we were able to crawl along at a foot's pace for a little way. Turning the corner we came plump into a large body of native policemen, who were standing helplessly among the crowd. But they also recognised the Dean, and, with friendly grins, linked arms on either side of his carriage and made a lane down which we progressed safely to a side street, which enabled us to escape into the comparative silence of the European town.

MIXED MARRIAGES



THE SANCTUARY.

CHAPTER XII

MIXED MARRIAGES

CONSIDERING that they were comparatively few in number, a good deal of our time was taken up by marriages. It is not such an easy thing as you might think to be married in Egypt, except for the British soldier, who has some mysterious privilege of getting married "between the lines." Every other outsider who wishes to do the thing properly must be married twice, in some cases three times, and I knew an unfortunate girl who had to be married four times to the same man before she could be declared altogether his wife. She took two days over it. They were of different nationalities, hence they had to be married in two different consulates. They were of different religions, so they had afterwards to be married in two churches. A Frenchman whose business took him all over the world told us that for years he had carried about with him the written permission of his parents for his marriage in case

he should meet with his "future" in the course of his travels. Englishwomen who marry Frenchmen without first making sure that their husband has this written permission are apt to find themselves landed in serious difficulties. A Copt who wished to marry an Englishwoman had first to get the signed permission of his patriarch—not by any means an empty form. For this couple the two religious marriages would really have sufficed, but as the bride's relatives could not be persuaded of this, they had a third marriage at the English consulate thrown in. On the other hand, no amount of civil or religious ceremonies can render legal a marriage between an Englishwoman and a Moslem Egyptian, because English law does not recognise a marriage between an Englishwoman and "any member of a polygamous community." This was laid down first with regard to Mormon marriages, but it is also applied to Mohammedan ones. Some attempts have been made of late years to upset this decision, and I am told that it has been reversed. But even if such marriages are now recognised by English law, that does not make them binding on the Moslem. He can still, by his own law, marry three other women in addition to the first ; or divorce his English

wife at any time and on any pretext. I remember one poor Englishwoman who had gone through the ceremony of marriage with a Moslem Egyptian in England. After some years, unable to bear the misery of her position, she applied for a divorce by English law. She could easily have got one as far as her case against the man went. But after taking legal advice it had to be explained to the poor thing that as she was not legally married, she could not be legally divorced.

An Englishman who was going to marry a Greek woman chose to assume that the two religious marriages would suffice, as if they had been two Egyptians. When, on the eve of the day fixed, the guests invited, the wedding feast ordered, the honeymoon leave secured, he came to the Dean for some last formalities and was asked about the time of the consular ceremony, the Dean discovered that he had not even given notice of his proposed marriage at the Consular Court. Everything had to be put off for more than a fortnight, to the extreme inconvenience of all concerned.

On one occasion we were told that a native lady wished to speak to the Dean. My services were required as interpreter, and when we went

into the ante-room we found it full of Syrians, the elder women in native dress, and one or two young people in vulgar European dress. After the usual compliments, one of the elder women took the floor.

"The father and mother of this young man," she began, pointing with a dramatic gesture to one of the pseudo-Europeans, "do not wish him to marry this young girl. The father and mother of this young girl"—here she indicated one of the young women—"do not wish her to marry this young man. *Therefore* we come to the Priest of the English to marry them."

The case was complete. She sat down amid a murmur of applause and waited for us to express our gratification.

We humbly intimated that at least one of the parties had to be of English nationality before they could be married in the English Church.

She dismissed the objection with an airy wave of the hand.

"They are both of them quite willing to belong to the English Church," she remarked.

"But that is not enough," we submitted. "No one can be married in this Church who has not the right to be contracted first in the British Consulate."

"If that is all," she said, "we will go first to the British Consulate and return here."

"But he would not receive you," we explained. "He could not, unless you were written in the Book of the English (*i.e.* naturalised as British subjects).

"Then they shall be written in the Book of the English," she said proudly. "We can take money to him and tell him to do so."

It took us a long time to explain to the old lady that her friends could not possibly go and purchase the coveted citizenship, even at a great price. At length we succeeded in bowing them off the premises, probably to go and inquire whether any other convenient nationality might not be bought for cash down. But we never saw them again.

Another day we had a visit from a man who spoke no English and was certainly some sort of Oriental, but he called himself an Italian French Protestant and desired to be married in the Protestant Church. We patiently explained that we were the English Church and could marry no one but British subjects.

"Then," he said, "will you kindly tell me *how* I can get married? I am obliged to leave Cairo for months in a fortnight's time, and it is of the

greatest importance that I should be married before I go."

We gave him the correct procedure—legal contract of marriage in both consulates—(I forget the lady's nationality), and then one or more religious ceremonies as they might desire.

"We both desire to be married in the Protestant Church," he remarked. "As for the nationality, I have lost my papers, and I cannot obtain them again, as I do not know in what Italian town I was born."

This sounded suspicious. But we thought it possible that the consular pre-contract was not insisted upon in the French Protestant Church, and recommended him to go and consult the French Pastor. He departed with many thanks, but only to return again in an hour to say that the French Pastor was away from Cairo and would not return for three weeks. We expressed our sympathy and suggested that he should try the German Pastor. Again he posted off, and again he returned in much agitation. The German Pastor refused to be responsible for any marriages except those of German subjects. The would-be bridegroom entreated further advice at our hands, and we sent him to interview one of the missionaries. Then we

hastily left the house, and did not see him again till the next morning when he turned up again, still apologetic and still imploring. No, the English missionaries said they only married members of their own congregation. How could he belong to any congregation when his work took him up and down the shores of the Red Sea? We sent him to try the American mission, and he did not return. But the same afternoon one of the American ministers called upon us, and we asked for the sequel.

"Ah, I was coming to speak to you about that," said the minister. "I told him we would marry him right enough if he would satisfy us that he had no other wife living. But I am afraid he did not understand and went away thinking we had refused. I wanted you to explain to him when he came again. You see, he cannot speak either English or Arabic, so there was a difficulty."

We prepared to rejoice the heart of the nondescript when next he appeared, but we never saw him again. Perhaps he had really understood the nature of the test required of him and could not satisfy it; perhaps he had decided to get married in the Greek (Oriental) Church, which takes no heed of consular

contracts, at any rate we never saw him again, and do not know whether he succeeded in getting married or not.

We have had several rather uncommon weddings in our church which were not against our regulations, and one of the most unusual was a double one between an Egyptian who belonged to his national Church and an English-woman who belonged to her national Church. The bride was the fatherless niece of an English clergyman, who brought her out from England for the occasion. There was some difficulty as to the Egyptian service, because the bridegroom's domicile was in Assiout, and when in Cairo he generally attended the English service, so that he was not a member of any Cairo congregation. Finally it was agreed that both the religious services should take place in the English church. A small altar was prepared in the Egyptian manner in the chancel, and covered with white embroidered silk. On this was placed the wooden frame which supports the tapers in the Coptic church, and four candlesticks at the corners. Besides the tapers, two beautiful old silver crosses were affixed to the frame in an erect position, and two of the rare and beautiful silver flabella which



THE CHOIR UP A TREE.

are still found in some Egyptian churches. In the centre was the great silver textus case containing a sealed copy of the Gospels. The English and Egyptian choirs assembled outside the vestry door, and went in procession to the great door and up the church. The six Egyptian boys were vested in long white surplices with the crossed stoles peculiar to an Egyptian choir-boy, and high caps like mitres. Both the caps and stoles were of crimson velvet, embroidered with gold crosses. Our six English lads looked very nice in their purple linen cassocks and plain white surplices. I was a little nervous about them, for I knew that nothing, however unexpected, would disturb the solemn behaviour of an Egyptian chorister on such an occasion, and our boys were all rather excited. I was well aware that if they giggled or otherwise departed from strict decorum it would be commented upon unfavourably to the English church in many an Egyptian gathering, so I made a private appeal to them beforehand not to let any one be able to say that the Egyptian choir-boys behaved better than the English ones. One of them pleaded, "You see, we're more lively than they are, we can't help it." But they did help it,

and carried themselves nobly through all that followed. The English processional cross was carried by an Egyptian bearer in a splendid cope of crimson velvet. Indeed, the only difference observable between the copes of the cross-bearer and the officiating priest was that the priest's cope was embroidered with heavy gold crosses. The two English clergymen followed in their usual garb—cassock, surplice, and hood, with white stoles. As the procession moved up the church the Egyptian choir chanted a hymn in Arabic, but most of their responses were made in Greek or Coptic. Two chairs were placed for the bride and bridegroom during the Coptic ceremony which was the first celebrated, but though the bride was robed in English bridal fashion, the bridegroom declined to wear the wedding garments of his own nation. He should also have been robed in a magnificent cope. Nor did he remove his fez after the English custom. They were, however, duly crowned and anointed in the Egyptian ceremony, and were covered with the white silk wedding veil which should rest upon both heads, but in this case slipped down at once to the shoulders of the bride and groom.

As soon as the marriage sacrament was

concluded the Egyptian priest solemnly disrobed without leaving his place before the temporary altar, and delivered the address to the bride and bridegroom in his ordinary black robe. Then the English marriage service followed, and was also choral. The wedded pair, who had not previously broken their fast, received the Communion according to the English rite at the conclusion of the double service.

This mixed marriage had a tragic end. The English wife had borne two baby girls to her Egyptian husband, and had been in England with them for the summer. Leaving the little ones to follow later she came out to join her husband in Egypt by a French steamer. A few hours before the ship arrived at Alexandria, where her husband was waiting to meet her, she was found dead in her cabin with her head almost severed from her body, having been brutally murdered during the night. No arrests were made, the matter was never really inquired into, and nothing was ever discovered to account for the murder. Nothing seemed to be missing from the cabin, and the only conjecture put forward was that the unhappy lady had been murdered *by mistake!*

SOME EGYPTIAN STORIES

CHAPTER XIII

SOME EGYPTIAN STORIES

IN Egypt one of the first things you have to learn about any thing or person is not their name, but what he, she, or it is called. I am sure that Lewis Carroll must have been thinking of the Egyptians when he wrote the scene where Alice tries to find out the name of the White Knight's Song.

Every one has a nickname by which they are always known among the natives. The Dean, whose stature was barely five foot six, was always known as the Great Priest. His successive curates, who were none of them less than six feet, were invariably known as the Little Priest. One Englishman was the Father of Beards, another the Father of Moustaches, while yet a third, whose temper was none of the best, was known as the Father of Kicks. Professor Sayce was always referred to as the "Priest of the River." The highest Englishman in the

land was not exempt from this rule, though in his case they did think they were calling him by his proper name. Lord Cromer was always known as "Bring." I never wrote or talked Egyptian politics, but my Egyptian friends could not always refrain from the attempt to do so. I remember after a "crisis" had just been successfully tided over, having occasion to visit the priest of Abu Sefayn, who took a keen interest in political and social affairs. He tried to give his attention to the matter in hand, but was preoccupied and managed to get me aside from my companions. Then he asked in an eager whisper, "Bring mabsoot? Bring mabsoot?" ("Is Baring satisfied?") And when my servant solemnly announced "Mrs. Bring," I knew that Lady Cromer would follow him round the screen.

One of the most characteristically Egyptian nicknames is that for the coastguard service. I once started to spend a few days with a friend whose husband was in charge of a coastguard station, and it was not until I had left Alexandria and was travelling westward that I realised I had forgotten to ask what was the Egyptian nickname for the coastguard. However, I was going to a small place, and I supposed that

every one would know the Englishman's name even if they did not call him by it. By and by I was set down with my bag in the desert. There was no apparent station, only an irregular cluster of houses. I asked several natives, but no one recognised my friend's name. However, they pointed to a house by the sea, and said an Englishman lived there. So I picked my way across the sand to find an unknown Englishwoman at work in the verandah, who to all my inquiries replied, "I don't know, I'm sure; I'm a stranger here." Finally, after wandering in the desert from house to house and trying to explain in Arabic the nature of a coastguard so as to discover his nickname, a brilliant native suddenly exclaimed, "Oh, you mean a *contrabando*! Of course we all know the head of the contrabando service," and without further ado he took me straight to my friend's house!

It is commonly supposed that native Christians and Mohammedans will not work together, but under the Englishman at any rate they do so, and can even take a joke at their own expense from each other. An Englishman who had a Coptic cook and a Moslem suffragi, one day found his Mohammedan servant in fits of laughter, and asked the reason.

“ Well,” said Mustafa, “ I was talking to Tadrus (Theodorus), and I told him that for all his fondness for the English he knew very well that in his heart he believed they were heretics and would go straight to hell. But he told me it was not so. He explained that this question had troubled the Copts a good deal, but that God had revealed to a pious Copt who had prayed earnestly concerning this matter, that there is a large vestibule to heaven where all the good English Christians go, and where they are quite happy, though they are not admitted into the inner heaven. So I asked him, ‘ What about the Katolikas (Roman Catholics) and the Protestants (Presbyterians)? ’ ‘ Oh,’ he said, ‘ all the good ones will go there too ; it is a very large vestibule.’ And I said, ‘ Then all the good Mohammedans will be in the vestibule too? ’ And what do you think he said to me, ‘ *Is it a pig-stye ?* ’ ”

This is the version of the story which I liked best. But I am bound to say that Professor Sayce has published a slightly different version in his paper on Egyptian folk-lore, which throws the responsibility for the final question on the Almighty Himself.

Our church servant belonged to the ancient

Church of his country, and it is true that when he was first engaged two of the Mohammedan servants conspired together to get him disgraced and dismissed. But I made them clearly understand that if the same thing happened again not only the Copt but themselves would be dismissed, and the hint was quite enough. They began by tolerating him, and ended by being friendly. But they do not know anything of each other's families, and till lately no Mohammedan would be admitted into a Christian house except in some cases as a servant. Yet when Suliman's first child was born, and for two or three days he was in miserable anxiety, as both mother and child were said to be dying, his Moslem fellow-servants showed him the greatest sympathy. They took his work that he might be absent, made suggestions of remedies to be tried, but confided to me that it was quite impossible to save the son at any rate. However both lived—the son to be burnt to death, poor little fellow, a few years later—and when both were out of danger Suliman made a great feast for his first-born son, probably at the choosing of the child's name. He asked his fellow-servants, and they came to me to ask for a relaxation of the rule which forbade all the servants to be

absent at once, even at night. The one on duty, they explained, would only be absent about two hours, but they very much wished to accept the invitation in a body, as it was a new thing for a Mohammedan to be asked to a Christian household. I readily gave the permission, and next day asked how they had fared. Oh, they said, it was a very great festival, everything was well done, and they paid great honour to us. But in all the assembly we five were the only Mohammedans.

One of the stories I liked best was, I believe, a perfectly true one of inherited obligations.

When the British troops were making their way up the Nile in a vain attempt to relieve Khartoum and save Gordon, they came to a certain town and camped for the night. Some of the soldiers went off to obtain provisions and appear to have behaved badly, at any rate there was a brawl of some kind, and some natives were injured. Order was restored, but a deputation of village elders shortly appeared and insisted on seeing the officer in command. To his surprise, they formally remonstrated with him for breach of contract. "On our side," they said, "we had loyally kept and were keeping it. You were allowed to camp without interference,

and we were preparing to send you supplies. Why, then, did you break your agreement and send your men into our village?"

"But," said the officer, "I have no agreement with you. I never saw or heard of your village before."

"Are you not a white man and a Frangi?" asked the village elders indignantly. "It is true that we did not make the contract with you, our fathers made it with the white officer who came before you. But we have the contract still, and can show it you."

The officer naturally expressed a desire to see the contract, and the deputation went away and brought a letter from General Desaix of the army of Napoleon in 1799, in which he undertook that none of the soldiers of the advancing army should at any time enter that particular village as long as the camp was kept supplied with provisions. I am sorry to say that the story, as told to me, stopped at this tableau. But I have no doubt that the English officer, whose name I cannot remember, loyally accepted his inherited obligations.

If it was occasionally difficult for us to remember that our position was changed after the British occupation, and that we were no

longer entitled to exercise summary jurisdiction on our own account, it was still more difficult for the Turkish Pasha. As an Egyptian of the lower classes said to me one day in speaking of our rule: "It is very good for the fellaheen, but very bad for the Bashawat. That Pasha"—indicating one of the half-deserted palaces which took up so many acres of ground—"used to keep a hundred servants before the English came. Now he can't afford to keep ten."

But it is not only in the matter of unpaid labour and gratuitous water that they have lost. A certain young Pasha of high rank had a difference of opinion, not many years ago, with his brother-in-law. He went to discuss the question with that gentleman, and finding him in a public room with several other Pashas, he proceeded to rebuke him with a revolver. The brother-in-law caught hold of the nearest Pasha as a shield; but the indignant one dodged round and round shooting wildly. Most of the Pashas left hurriedly—to fetch doctors, they afterwards explained. One of the Ministers, according to rumour, entrenched himself beneath the sofa. Finally, the brother-in-law was left for dead upon the field, and the excited young Turk rushed out into the street, still

brandishing his revolver. There happened to be a solitary English soldier strolling by, who was subsequently called upon to give an account of himself.

"Well, sir," said Tommy, "I was walking along, and I see a native rush out of a house with a revolver in his hand, and a lot of people shouting murder behind. So I just gave him a clout on the head, and took away his revolver. I hope I didn't do no harm, sir."

Much to the young Pasha's astonishment he was sent to prison for several months. But to this day he does not understand why the English should take upon themselves to interfere in a family quarrel.

THE LITTLE OLD LADY



A SLAVE.

CHAPTER XIV

THE LITTLE OLD LADY

HER full name was "the Little Old Lady who stands on her head in church." But this title, though sufficiently descriptive, was felt to be cumbersome for general use ; so for many years she was known simply as the Little Old Lady. Until she died, I think few of the many to whom she was a familiar figure ever realised that she had any other name. Except myself, I do not think any one knew how or where she lived, and I did not find out for some time. She was always in church before any one else and remained till the last. It was during the celebration of the early communion that she indulged in the remarkable performance which gave her the nickname by which we all knew her. At a certain moment she would double herself in two between the seats, her body going upward from her feet to her waist, and then straight down with her head upon the floor—previously spread

carefully with a clean pocket-handkerchief. In this position she would remain for a considerable time.

"Why do you call her 'the Little Old Lady who stands on her head'?" asked a friend of mine soon after she first came.

"Because she does . . . in church," I replied, and my friend looked rather shocked at me. But a little later she came to me between distress and laughter.

"You were quite right," she said, "but I did not in the least believe you, and now what do you think I have done." On my requiring instant particulars.—"You know I stayed for the midday celebration, and suddenly I saw a little old lady fall on her head between two seats and stick so that she could not raise herself. At least I thought so, and I couldn't imagine why Dr. D., who was not far behind her, took no notice. I thought she would die if no one helped her, so I went softly to Dr. D. and whispered to him that an old lady in front had fallen down in a fit. He just looked up, and when he saw who it was, he only said, 'No, she's all right,' and never moved. I lost patience and said, 'Dr. D., can't you *see* she's in a fit?' I suppose he thought it would make less

fuss if he yielded, for he got up and followed me meekly. When we began to touch her she suddenly reared herself straight up, smiled sweetly at us, and then down she went on her head again. We retired in disorder, and I don't know what Dr. D. thinks of me."

Naturally this was not the only time that the mistake was made. I took to sitting just behind the Little Old Lady at the early service to restrain by a resolute gesture any stranger who rose from his knees to go to her assistance. The regular congregation soon learned to understand and respect her eccentricities of worship. I had hardly ever spoken to her, as I believed she preferred to be left alone. But one morning as she tottered out into the garden after the early service, I thought she looked so frail and ill that I ran after her and begged her to come in to breakfast and rest between the services.

"Oh, thank you very much," she said. "Yes, I should have liked it, only I really think I must go back and have my bath. You see, I have been out all night, and have not dressed yet."

Now the night in question had been one of our rare nights of storm in Egypt, and when

storms do come to us they are very violent. It had been thundering and lightning, and raining in sheets—the roads were still like canals in many places.

“What can have happened!” I exclaimed. “It was a dreadful night for you to be out.”

“Well, you see it was the Egyptian Easter Eve, and I went to the Egyptian service in the cathedral. That begins about seven, but I wanted also to go to the Greek, as my landlord had promised to take me. So I had to leave a little before the Coptic service finished (it ends just after midnight), but when I got home (indignantly) my landlord had gone to bed, and said it was too bad to go out.”

My sympathies were entirely with the landlord, but I did not express them. It was evident that she had not followed his example, so I asked what she had done.

“Oh, I went alone—what else could I do? And I was absolutely obliged to take a carriage instead of walking, because the streets were so deep in water. And when I got there, the Greek Cathedral was shut! There were one or two people standing near, and a young Englishman was very polite. He came up and told me the service did not begin for an hour, he

had made the same mistake as I had, but he seemed to think I should go home."

"And you did not?"

"Oh no!" with mildly resentful surprise. "He helped me out, and got a door open for me, and I sat and waited for the service. But by the time it was over, you see, I had only time to come straight here, or I should have been too late for our service."

"Then surely that is all the more reason why you should come in at once and have something to eat."

"Oh no, I must go and dress for church."

"You surely won't come back for the 10.30 service? You look ready to drop now."

"Oh yes, I must come back," said the soft, obstinate voice.

And off she tottered, refusing all offers, even of a carriage, and at 10.30 I saw her in her accustomed place in church. But I made it my business to find out about her afterwards, she looked so much too ill and old to be left alone. I found that she lived quite alone with some Greeks, one of whom had been a waiter in some hotel where she had stayed on her first arrival, and she seemed to have fallen quite into their power. They were continually changing their

rooms, taking her with them, and she seemed to be wretchedly poor. But at last I found her in such a dreadful room, in a back street off the native bazaar, that I made up my mind to interfere. I told her such a place was really impossible for an Englishwoman and that she must let me find her a decent room. Then I ascertained what I had before suspected, that she had fallen quite into the hands of these Greeks, and she confessed to me that she dared not tell them she was going to leave.

It was early in June, and she was already ill, if she had stayed in that room all the summer she would have died. So at last I persuaded her to say she was going for a little change to Ras el-Bahr—the cheapest place I could think of—and on this excuse she could take away all her luggage. I would take her larger box home with me, and find her a new room which she could go straight to on her return, so that the Greeks need not even know that she had returned to Cairo. I found her a room on the roof of a fairly low house near the church, a piece of the roof was screened off to make a sitting-room for her, and there was a kind motherly sort of landlady whom I knew personally. I was half afraid she would say it was

too expensive, but she acknowledged that she had been paying the Greeks even more. She liked the look of her new quarters so much that, to my amusement, she only took the seven hours' journey to Ras el-Bahr, because she wanted to give that as her reason for leaving the Greeks. I saw her off, but after three days I got a message to say she had come back to her new room, and might she have her box?

On this roof she lived for years, and gradually became more and more dependent on us. I found out by degrees that she was the widow of a Somersetshire squire, that she had a son who died a young man—I assumed after running through everything, as I gathered that the Somersetshire estate had been sold—and that she had two daughters who lived in England. It was not until I had for years been supplying her as delicately as I could with articles of dress, furniture, etc., that I found out the Little Old Lady was not really badly off. I think she must have taken a vow of poverty—she was one of those women who had fallen years before under the influence of an extreme Ritualist, and had no real knowledge by which to correct his assertions. She often made me think of one

of the saddest letters I ever read, a letter written by an aunt of mine at the age of twelve to a clergyman. After giving an unconscious but piteous picture of the effects of misguided teaching, the poor child went on to ask a practical question. Would it be sufficient if she should examine herself for venial sins every Wednesday, and for *mortal* sins every Friday? My poor Little Old Lady was so very much afraid of committing a sin in the way of food or drink or dress, or such personal indulgence as taking a carriage when she was tired, that she gradually ceased to care about the real things of life and faith, or rather to perceive them.

She was a vegetarian and a total abstainer to begin with, so there was not much room for ordinary fasting in her life. So she went in for extraordinary fasting, and used to go without food of any kind till three, in Lent, and then eat only vegetables cooked in water, according to the rules of the Egyptian Church. As she grew older it became a matter of grave anxiety to me each year whether she would get through Lent without dying of starvation. Argument was of no use. As I told her, she ought to have become a Roman Catholic, for then her director

would have put a stop to such proceedings on the part of an old lady ; or at any rate to the absolute abstinence from all food or drink which she imposed upon herself from Thursday evening till after early communion on Easter day. But like all English people of her persuasion she recognised no authority except "the Church," as it had once been explained to her by some individual clergyman. I never quite understood how she tolerated us, except that no one ever knew the Dean without recognising in him a type of Christianity above all schools. Still she would no more obey him in this matter than a High Church parson will obey his bishop. Oddly enough, I believe the services at All Saints were the original cause of her wanderings coming to an end at Cairo. Before that she seems to have lived for some years like the Wandering Jew. She had made one attempt to go back to the old life before she came to her anchorage near us. She disappeared from Cairo, and we were told that she had been last seen "on the deck of a steamer bound for Burmah." She had been everywhere, and never seemed to remember anything that she had seen. I believe that she did everything (on principle) in so uncomfortable a fashion that she was con-

scious of nothing but physical discomfort when travelling.

Once I remember she told me that by accident she had got into a steamer which brought her down the Adriatic on the wrong side (*i.e.* the side she was not intending to go). So when she reached her port of destination, she took another steamer straight back in order to come down the right side. Another summer she had casually strolled round the seven churches of Asia. She travelled quite alone and nearly always third class, even in the East.

But though most of us knew her eccentricities, not many of us were aware of the real generosity which at one time was the secret reason for most of them. Starving and scrimping may have become a habit in her solitary old age, but it began by being a very real self-denial in the spirit of David, "Neither will I offer unto the Lord of that which will cost me nothing."

It was the Little Old Lady who, having saved the money from her income, gave the electric light to All Saints' Church. It was she who gave the stained-glass window in Boulak Chapel. And there are many other smaller things that she gave, but all under the same pledge of

secrecy ; a pledge that now she has gone where all secrets are made known we do not think binding any more. She starved herself, but for nearly two years she paid for a good meal of hot meat every day for one of the poor feminine waifs who, without any real qualifications, tried to earn their living as daily governesses in Cairo. Another woman preyed upon her to such an extent that I had to take steps to prevent it. But on herself she would spend nothing.

Poor Little Old Lady, she got so much attached to the room which I had found for her that she never travelled again, and when after some years she was turned out in spite of all I could do to prevent it, the shock was too much for her. She lived another year, though she was then past eighty, but her mind was never quite clear after the move. I found her a home with some Sisters who were as kind as possible to her. It required constant attention to prevent her starving herself to death. Yet, though she dreaded life, the strange part of her religion was that she dreaded death still more. But the Father whom she could not trust was very merciful to her, and took her away in her sleep. In that still garden of the souls where the

English names outnumber now the living population, there is a small cross on which, besides the proper name which no one knew, you will find the one by which we all recognised her—the Little Old Lady.

ENGLISH FLOWERS IN AN
EGYPTIAN GARDEN

CHAPTER XV

ENGLISH FLOWERS IN AN EGYPTIAN GARDEN

AN American lady once said to me that the chief thing which struck all travelled Americans about us was that “wherever *we* go, all over the world, we find you English *at home*.” I do not think it had ever occurred to me before, but the remark was both shrewd and true. It is really, perhaps, a national characteristic that though in Canada, in Australia, and in New Zealand, as well as in India, in Burmah, and in all the other lands which go to make up the Empire, we look back to the little sea-girt island which some of us have never seen as “home,” still we are always trying, not only in the countries where it comes natural, since we really are a piece of the old home over-seas, but amidst alien races, and in spite of unfavourable conditions, to reproduce as far as possible the atmosphere of “home.” It is so in India, I believe, and it is certainly so in

Egypt, where we have English churches and English parsonages as centres of English life (to say nothing of the racecourse and cricket ground), English ways in houses not unlike our English ones, and English flowers in our gardens.

All the glory of the gold mohur gives us less pleasure than the tiny primrose blossom which we have nursed with so much difficulty; the heavy scented tuber-rose in our gardens is less valued than the yellow daffodil; and the scent of the babul is chiefly loved for its resemblance to that of the wallflower, which we can hardly persuade to blossom.

Some of our home flowers are not at all difficult to grow, and seem rather to thrive for the change of climate. I do not know where the sunflower originally came from, but it was certainly brought here from England within the last thirty years, and now you see the great golden-flowered shrubs towering above the agricultural crops at irregular distances out in the peasants' fields all over the country. I have a photograph of ourselves, standing in the shade of one of our sunflowers, which measured twelve feet from root to crown when it was cut down. Some bulbs and tubers take very kindly to the warmer clime. I do not think that





A DAY THAT IS DEAD,

freezias will grow out of doors in England ; but here the delicate green spikes and sweet primrose-coloured flowers thrive like weeds under the rose-bushes, and seem to grow stronger every year. Violets I could not grow at all, except just under the study windows. This, however, is not because they do not take kindly to the soil, but because they are so much in demand in the tourist season that native human nature cannot resist the temptation of pilfering them from any part of a garden where they can be hastily gathered out of sight of the house windows. I say native human nature, but sometimes the tourist is the greater sinner. Our garden was easily entered from the road, and these gentry have even gone so far as to come in when I was actually sitting out in my private garden with my own friends, and walk all round, passing me quite close, without a word of apology for the intrusion.

White violets are very rare in Egypt, and are an irresistible temptation. I took the trouble at one time to import several clumps from France, and at the same time sent for some white violet seed from England. The clumps throve so well that I sowed very little of the seed, but gave it away to a friend. That year, however, I went

away for a holiday, and when I came back there was not a single white-violet plant left in the garden. It was hard to go out to dinner and meet my friend's husband with a cluster of white violets in his buttonhole—which I am bound to say he promptly presented to me! I told my woes, and they at once sent me some healthy young plants just coming into flower, raised from seed which I had given them. Affi and Matbouli were warned that if these also disappeared they would be held responsible.

I once managed to raise some lovely tufts of primroses, the first seen in Egypt. But these plants, too, mysteriously disappeared, and I did not try again till, fired by the success of the same friend,—who is a much better gardener than I am,—I sent for some more roots from England. These, I fear, died a natural death, nor has any one really succeeded in keeping them.

But of all the English visitors to our gardens I think we value most the sweet peas. They have a sad tendency to deteriorate here, and one should import fresh seed at least every other year. I have generally a long row of them down one side of the broad walk; and the six weeks during which their butterfly heads nod a morning greeting to me as I come down the

verandah steps into the garden are some of the pleasantest in the year. They begin towards the end of March, and last all through April and part of May; while at the same time the Cape May, the white iris, and all the English roses are in full beauty.

By the English roses I mean the more recently imported kinds, which have not yet become accustomed to the new conditions. They blossom in a bewildered way early in March. Everything assures them that summer has come, and it is certainly warm enough; but they do not feel that their winter sleep has been sufficiently long, and the fierce sun kisses their petals open before the buds have come to their full size. They continue blooming for two or three months, and then retire disgusted from the contest with the commoner roses, who seem not to know that there are times and seasons for all things, and that no self-respecting English rose can keep up a constant supply of fine blossoms for more than three months.

There is a curious difference in this respect between the English and the French roses. We got out a batch from each country in the same year; mostly different kinds, it is true, but even when I had a rose of the same kind of each country

the difference of behaviour was marked. The English roses are much more vigorous of growth, they made larger bushes and finer blooms. But for about nine months of the year they gave us nothing but leaves, or at most a solitary flower, which comes out to see what is going on in this new and puzzling world. The white moss-rose will not even condescend so far ; I had her seven years and she did not flower once, though she was continually sending up fresh shoots and getting them burnt brown by the sun. The French roses spent all their strength in trying to flower the whole year round, at the expense of a continual deterioration in quality. It made me almost sad to look at Madame Falcot. She started flowering before she was a foot and a half high, and she hardly ever ceased, or grew, for three years. At first the flowers were long yellow blooms with deepening hearts, almost like a William Allen Richardson ; but they continually grew paler and thinner, and at last were little more than yellow wild roses of a particularly untidy shape. I counted eighteen buds and a full-blown rose on her slender stem at one time, and might find the same almost every day throughout the year.

The deep-red blossoms of the Cheshunt Hybrid

and the Reine Marie Henriette (also from England, in spite of its name), only show themselves in March, April, and May, but their long climbing branches have covered a trellis walk nine feet high, and they need continual cutting back. Deep-red roses are rare here; from the first importation they begin to deteriorate in colour, and after a few years they are little darker than the old-fashioned cabbage rose in England. But there are three roses which have taken most kindly to the land which has adopted them, and bloom all the year round with but little diminution of both size and colour. The first is La France, now the staple rose in every Egyptian garden, and consequently not so much valued as it ought to be. In February the gardeners always desire to cut every La France in the garden back to four or five inches of bare stems. The larkspur, nasturtiums, and white stocks are covering every rose-bed in the garden at that time, so that we could do without La France for six weeks, but they are never allowed to indulge in this wholesale operation. La France is quite as well for being allowed to grow two years before she is cut down; and I do not like to be without her sweet pink face in the garden, even for a time, so Affi

is only allowed to cut half the beds down each year.

Next in order is the yellow Marshal Neil, more beautiful in shape and growing freely over trellis-work, but the heavy heads are almost too much for the slender stems, and it is not so useful for the house, though it wears much better than La France in a buttonhole or on a dress.

Less beautiful in growth, but at its best in the short winter, though it flowers all through the year, is the sturdy Perle de Jardin, with its creamy flowers and deep-red shoots. There are three other roses that flower all the year, but, except for an occasional bloom of the Malmaison, they cannot compare with the first three.

Away to the north of Cairo a long avenue of sycamore figs (yes, figs *do* grow upon sycamores, *pace* my reviewer in the *Spectator*) leads to a deserted and half-ruined palace built for the delight of Mohammed Ali. Its gardens are now little more than a fragrant wilderness on the banks of the Nile; but there must once have been some one who cared for it and planted many lovely things in it, some of which still flourish in spite of neglect. Here are spikes of the *Yucca gloriosa* opening their green-white flowers behind a tangle of shrubs; here a path is almost

choked with the starry blue of the plumbago, which should have bordered it on either side, and every year the avenue of gold mohurs flames out in scarlet beauty though none be there to see.

But behind that clump of moaning pines, hard by the great marble bath into which the old Turk loved to upset his screaming harem, you will find something fairer than any flaming Oriental beauty in English eyes. It is the largest and most luxuriant banksia I ever saw, not even excepting the one at the Castle of Chillon. The Swiss banksia is yellow, but the Shoubra one is pure white, like a summer snow-drift over its great supporting trellis. Jessamine and I had leave to gather from it for Easter once, and we came back with a carriage full of the long white wreaths, one of which I fondly hoped might yield a white banksia for my own garden. But I never succeeded in getting a cutting to strike, and now, alas, owing to the misbehaviour of some tourists who were let in, the gates of this neglected paradise are sternly shut against us all.

Carnations do not thrive well with us, and are much prized by the poorest native as well as by the richest foreigner. Indeed, a carnation seems

as irresistible a temptation to a native as a cigarette or a pinch of tea. I had managed to raise a few in my garden, but though I always left buds just ready to open at night, in the morning I never found a flower. Finally, I discovered that the house-boys used to go out with the earliest sun to gather them and put them in water in the pantry, or give them to their wives; in fact, I came upon one of the wives in the act of receiving my carnations at the outer gate. I permitted her to depart in peace, but made some remarks later which put an end to the practice, or at any rate reduced it within reasonable limits.

Is it permissible, I wonder, to talk about potatoes in connection with English flowers? Certainly fresh potatoes, like fresh butter, are one of the benefits conferred upon this country by the English occupation. When I first arrived in Egypt every potato in the market was imported, but we soon found that potatoes thrive here as well as anywhere else, or better. But I had a desire to eat really *new* potatoes, the little white waxy delicacies which we distinguish by that name in England. It is impossible to buy them; but, I thought to myself, why not grow in a corner of the garden sufficient for a few

dishes? At any rate I had vivid recollections of the radiant mauve-and-white blossoms which fill the fields of Southern Italy in potato time, and I thought that such flowers would look pretty in a corner of my garden, even if the tubers were no better than those in the market. (*N.B.*—They were very much worse.) So I superintended the planting of two or three rows and waited. The leaves came up and seemed to flourish, but just when I began to look for flowers they all drooped and withered. I waited again a little, and then remarked to Afffi one day that I was afraid my English potatoes were not going to produce anything, as they had not flowered.

“But,” said Afffi, with the patience of a native whose Sitt is always trying foolish experiments but must be humoured, “it is just because they have not flowered that there may be potatoes at the roots. If you had flowers you could have no potatoes.”

I remonstrated with Afffi. I assured him that we never looked for tubers under *our* potatoes till the flowers had bloomed and died. But I could not move him from the quiet assertion that I must not expect to have flowers if I wanted potatoes.

Well, as generally happens, the native gardener was right after all. I have satisfied myself by inquiry that in Egypt potatoes either flower or make tubers, but consistently refuse to do both. Which they elect to do is, I believe, determined by the time of year at which they are planted.

An Egyptian garden has one great advantage over an English or German one—it is beautiful the whole year round. There are show places in Egypt, it is true, where the whole garden is now sacrificed to a passing fashion. For three months in the year it is a blaze of beauty, masses of costly English flowers are put out for the season in formal beds, surrounded by a green expanse of “English” lawn. Then at the end of the season the Pasha goes away, and the whole is ploughed up and left fallow till the autumn. But though this may be styled “the English fashion,” it is certainly not the English idea of making a garden; that pleasure of delight with which we love to surround our homes, and guard jealously from any eclipse of its beauty till nature is too strong for us, and our joys wither under the inexorable touch of winter frost.

I am no botanist, and the only way in which

I can describe our garden favourites is by comparing them with the tree or flower they most resemble in the gardens of the West. The *Bauhinia* is like a Judas tree, a mass of pale mauve-pink blossoms in spring, followed later by kidney-shaped leaves. But the flowers are much larger than those of any Judas tree that I have seen. It comes always in March or April, and is one of our floral notes of time. Most of our flowers are no guide to us in that respect, as they blossom the whole year round. Thus there is never a day in the year when we cannot gather roses and heliotrope in our garden, nor is there any month without the tall grace and golden burden of the sunflower. These grow to a great height in our sunny land. I measured one which was twelve feet high last year, and this year we had one taller still. We do not encourage the cheese-plate variety, ours are tall, swaying shrubs, with long-stemmed blossoms branching out all up the parent stalk, to the number of twenty or thirty.

Almost all through the year, too, the scarlet blossoms of the hibiscus open with the rays of the morning sun, and close as it sinks behind the locust trees which line the street.

I brought some blue larkspur seed from

England, which seeds itself and overruns the whole garden in the spring. But it is gradually changing colour, from deep blue through every shade of pink to a perfect white.

Since I lived in Egypt I have understood what the bean was, up the stem of which Jack clambered in search of the giant. It is of the scarlet runner kind, but its flowers are dull purple and its quickness of growth is incredible to those who have not seen it. One day the gardener flung a seed into the ground, and in a day or two he tied a string round the head, and then went up and tied the string round a stone on the roof of the house. This seemed to me premature. But before I could look round a leafy stem had disappeared out of sight over the parapet of the roof, and the bean went on till there was shortly, not one, but a regular rope of twisted stems, green with leaves and purple with flowers, from the garden bed to the house-top. I should have liked to send Affifi up the rope, but I had not insured his life, and thought it not improbable he might prove heavier than Jack.

Another of the same kind, but much prettier than Jack's bean, is the shell creeper, as it is aptly called. From a distance the flower is not

much to look at, but when held in the hand it is seen to be like a cluster of the most delicate spiral shells, about an inch long, in just the soft pearly shades of colour that you find in the inside of real shells; pale greenish yellow, deepening into pink-purple, and shading again into deeper yellow. This does not convey a clear impression of its delicate hues, but it is almost impossible to put in words the colours of a shell or a sunset.

Before the *Bougainvillia* has paled into magenta, the Cape May breaks into a white foam of blossom all along the garden. We had a hedge of it between the north and south gardens, and, like the *Bougainvillia* and *Bauhinia*, the flower comes before the new leaves. It always distressed my mother (who is a botanist) that I refused to refer to this shrub as the *Spirea*. But there are many *Spireas*, and there is only one Cape May, with its long swaying wreaths of delicate white blossoms, which are generally in fullest beauty about the end of April. Underneath the hedge of May there is a little runlet of clear water, fringed with irises. They are all white, and above their sword-like leaves the delicately scented blossoms shoot up, erect and graceful, all through April and May. The air is

full of the scent of orange-blossom, while, far above, the bluebell tree, which some people call a jacaranda, sends up a cloud of shimmering purple-blue against a pale dazzling sky, to be replaced later by a canopy of fern-like leaves. This and the gold mohur which begins to kindle its glorious flames towards the end of May, are two of the best shade trees in Egypt, and two of the most beautiful in flowering, but they are rarely seen except in private gardens.

For many years I had a laburnum tree, grown from English seed in my Egyptian garden ; but it never once flowered. Even with the Egyptian laburnum I have not been more fortunate. It is not a very common tree, and when long ago I told my brother, who was a botanist, that I wanted an Egyptian laburnum, he assured me that there was no such thing. However, I stuck to my point, that I wanted it, even if it did not exist, and described it as well as I was able. A few days afterwards I found a jug full of the "dropping wells of fire" awaiting me and a seed pod about a yard long, looking rather like a mummied snake. My brother had noticed the tree from the railway line, recognised it from my description, marked the place, and immediately on arriving in Cairo had taken a trolley and gone

back some miles in its quest. It took some time, I believe, before the astonished native realised that the important English official who had suddenly descended upon him only wanted a flowering branch from one of the trees in his garden. However, he sent a servant to gather it, and added the seeds, none of which, I regret to say, produced trees. Moreover, my brother informed me that on the whole it was permissible for me to call it the Egyptian laburnum, since he found it was known in India as the Indian laburnum. At the same time, I must not imagine that it had anything to do with the genus *Laburnum*.

Just in front of that corner of the verandah where I used to arrange the flowers for the house, there stood a palm tree, which, like all the others in our garden, was jealously guarded from the gardener's knife. For neither Affifi nor Matbouli have any but an enforced toleration for my sentimental ideas about palms. To the native mind the date tree is a thing grown for use and not for ornament. If, owing to the folly of the Sitt, they cannot bear dates, they should at least fulfil their equally important duty of making affas; consequently during most of the year they should present the aspect of a feather brush

from which almost all the turkey plumes have been cut away. But my palm trees were allowed to keep their splendid crowns untouched, and one year I resolved on a further innovation.

I dropped a seed of the giant convolvulus at the foot of the trunk, and lo ! in a week or two, the delicate tendrils had run up each curving palm branch, falling from one to another in festoons of vivid green, while every day hundreds of the bright blue cups open to the sunlight and outline the whole tree with "morning glory." As the sun waxes fierce they pale and droop, and by three o'clock they have given up the contest, and are no more seen till I come out at seven o'clock the next day, and every blossom smiles at me again in dazzling welcome. They may well rejoice to see me, for I saved their beautiful lives. One morning I found both the men standing under the palm and looking up at the swaying pendant blossoms with, I supposed, a tardy appreciation of the Sitt's fancies. I discovered that I was only just in time to prevent their tearing down and entirely uprooting this useless weed !

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And God fulfils Himself in many ways
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

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Unwatched the garden bough shall sway,
The tender blossom flutter down,

.
Till from the garden and the wild
A fresh association blow,
And year by year the landscape grow
Familiar to the stranger's child.

.
Our little systems have their day,
They have their day and cease to be.
They are but broken lights of Thee,
And Thou, O Lord, art more than they.

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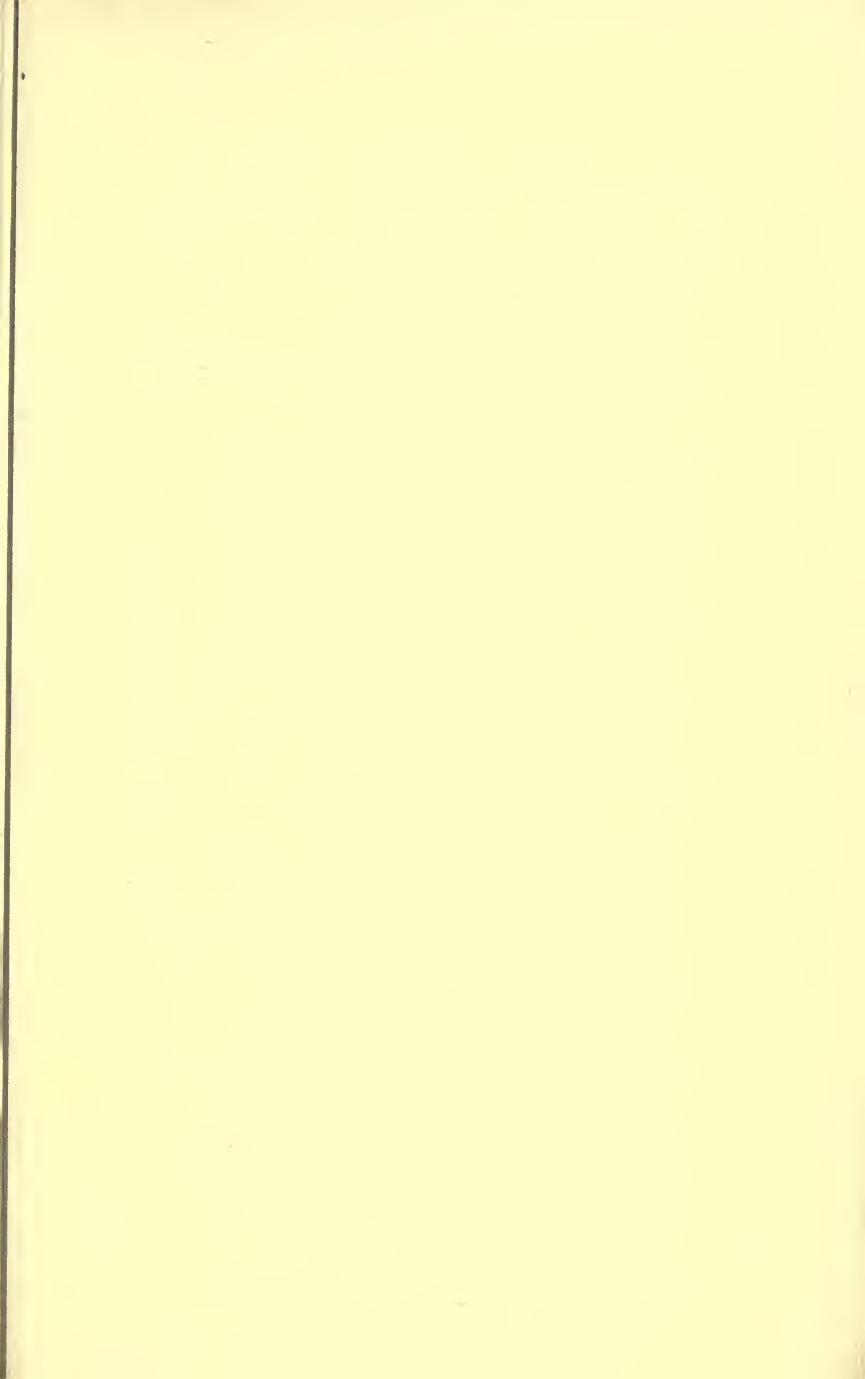
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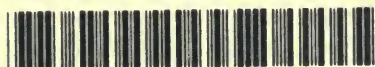
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